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CATHERINE DE MEDICIS.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET;
AND BELL & BRADFUTE, EDINBURGH.
1848.

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CATHERINE DE MEDICIS.

Margaret throwing herself at her mother's feet, who is seen pointing to the Cardinal "Consider, you have these ministers still to thank."

CATHERINE DE MEDICIS;

OR,

THE QUEEN-MOTHER.

A Romance.

BY

LOUISA STUART COSTELLO,

AUTHOR OF
"A SUMMER AMONGST THE BOCAGES AND THE VINES,"
"MEMOIRS OF JACQUES CŒUR,"
&c. &c. &c.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET;
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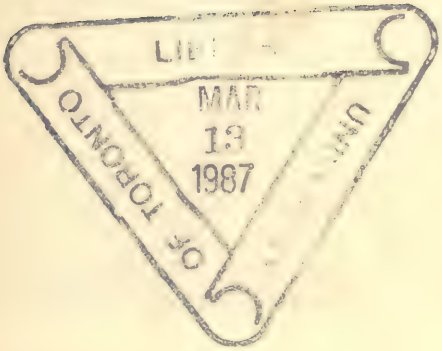
1848.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PREFACE

TO THE THIRD EDITION.

SINCE the first appearance of this work, many and great changes have taken place in the aspect of affairs in that important country, in whose capital the principal scenes are laid; but they merely tend to show that the character of the people has never altered, and that the same mixture of frivolity and cruelty, generosity and savage ferocity, exists now as in former ages. Though little is left of the bigotry and superstition which led to the fearful outrages of St. Bartholomew, and though all religions are now supposed to be tolerated in France, just the same spirit of persecution, violence, turbulence, and love of novelty remains, prompting that most unstable of all nations now to exalt their rulers into deities, and to pay them blind homage, and then to oppress and degrade them, and pursue them with the most bitter hatred.

Henry IV., whom they adored, met with the same fate as Henry III., whom they detested, and from the time when assassination deprived them of the most worthy of their monarchs, the attachment to royalty, weakened during a series of years by the vices of some of the worst of kings, has declined, until, even the glories of their military idol effaced, the French

people have resolved to wipe from the tablet of their memory every recollection of history, and begin a new career independent of all that has gone before.

The wheel, however, will still turn round, and that which has been will be reproduced: the same discontents amongst the working classes, the same restlessness amongst the army, the same turbulence amongst the students, and frivolity and recklessness amongst the great, will always characterise the most uncertain and vacillating people under the sun.

Their republican fancies will vanish like their imperial dreams, and some new political plaything will succeed the favourite pastime of the hour, but the late occurrences seem to forbid their best friends to hope that time will ever teach them stability.

Remorse has generally followed rapidly upon their crimes, as in the case of the reign of massacre which characterised the time of the Valois; but, alas! the recollection of that disgraceful page of their history did not deter them from acting scenes of even worse barbarity at a later period, nor has it checked them in the wilful career which they have now chosen as "wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best."

It is to be hoped that the line of conduct they have now adopted will not cause them to retrograde to the times of anarchy and civil war, of which these pages are a record.

London, June 22. 1848.

CATHERINE DE MEDICIS;

OR,

THE QUEEN-MOTHER.

CHAPTER I.

LA PAIX BOITEUSE.

"Gone to be married—gone to swear a peace!"
SHAKSPEARE.

FULL, bright and sparkling in the brilliant sun of early June, the waters of the Loire rolled majestically along beneath the high-arched bridge of Blois, on which stood an almost countless multitude of people, gazing with eager curiosity, evidently in expectation of some interesting spectacle. The river was covered with gaily-ornamented barges, filled with eager spectators. The royal banner of France waved from the highest tower of the castle; and from the heights, where rose the spires of the cathedral and the palace of the bishop, streamed in the breeze, gay pennons, emblazoned with the arms of the church and of the town. The broad quays, shaded with enormous trees, were swarming with people, who pressed and crushed their neighbours in their endeavours to obtain the most advantageous position from whence to view the spectacle, for which they had waited for hours in patient anticipation. It appeared that some event of absorbing interest was about to take place, and the same eager curiosity seemed to animate every individual in that immense mass of human beings. From the river side to

the embattled hills above, the antique streets of Blois rise almost precipitously: many of them are cut in steps to afford an easier assent to foot passengers, no horse, nor vehicle of any kind being able to attempt to mount the stony way, which seems a part of the rock; from distance to distance, where a turn of the street afforded a glimpse of the town and river below, every roof and window was crowded with heads, thrust forward with anxious desire to behold what all sought.

It was easy to detect that the havoc of recent war had left its traces on many of the houses and walls; but the greatest care had been taken to conceal any such appearances by gorgeous draperies of tapestry hung in all directions. Where breaches still remained unrepaired, temporary scaffolding had been erected for musicians, gaily and fantastically attired, whose loud instruments joined the swelling echoes of the trumpets, which at intervals announced the nearer approach of welcome and honoured guests to the royal party, who awaited with the same anxiety as the populace the last peal of cannon from the ramparts, proclaiming that the young King of Navarre, and his illustrious mother, had entered the gates of Blois, attended by King Charles the Ninth in person, and a gallant train of nobles, all vying with each other in attentions to their long-sought visitors.

Greeted by the admiring shouts of the excited multitude, the royal cavalcade wound slowly up the steep hill which conducts to the castle: fresh peals of artillery announced their arrival before its gates, and fresh bursts of music heralded their entrance through the venerable arch, which leads to the court of Stephen.

They reached the foot of the beautiful winding staircase, whose carved ornaments glittered like alabaster in the dancing sunbeams, and through every loophole of whose elegantly wreathed and twisted tower looked forth richly-dressed ladies of the court and cavaliers in splendid costumes, studding the whole surface at rising distances, till, at the dome-shaped summit, groups appeared, waving scarfs and flags, embroidered with glittering devices in honour of the day. Here King Charles alighted from his

richly adorned charger, and his example was followed by all his courtiers, who approached the Queen of Navarre and her son and daughter, and assisted them to dismount.

Above the elaborately ornamented gateway, where stand in high relief the statues of the Father of his People and his beloved Duchess Anne, in a projecting balcony, about the centre of the façade of the palace, a party of magnificently-attired ladies were stationed. Conspicuous amongst them, was the majestic and commanding figure of the Queen-mother, Catherine de Medicis, and great was the beauty displayed by the distinguished females who surrounded her. As the stunning sound of the cannon told the arrival of the royal *cortège*, a shower of garlands descended from the balcony of the Queen-mother, at the feet of Jeanne de Navarre.

The countenance of Catherine had hitherto worn an expression of anxious suspense almost painful, as from time to time she bent over the heavy stone parapet on which she was leaning; and her eye wandered with uneasy glances around, as she occasionally turned to some of her attendant ladies, and inquired hastily: "Is the Princess Marguerite not yet arrived?" The reply in the negative, which had been several times given, seemed to cause her considerable annoyance; her dark brows contracted, and her lips became compressed with emotions which she seemed desirous of concealing. When, however, she beheld the Queen of Navarre alighting from her horse, her stirrup held by Charles, whose face was irradiated with smiles, and when she marked the happy, frank and grateful expression on the face of the noble-minded mother of the young Bearnois, a load seemed removed from her heart, and with a long, deep-drawn breath, she murmured to herself, "All is secured!"—and turning from the balcony, entered the chamber of state, into which her guests were shortly afterwards conducted by their courteous and gallant host.

Nothing could exceed the cordiality of meeting extended to the unsuspicious and open-hearted Jeanne, whose eyes filled with tears of pleasure, as she presented to the Queen-mother her blushing and beautiful daughter Cathe-

rine, and her young son, whose bashfulness kept him constantly in the rear, close to her. Embraces, congratulations, protestations of eternal friendship, entreaties that the past should be buried in oblivion, and vows and prayers that the future might be all sunshine throughout the united kingdoms of France and Navarre, with assurances of the delight and gratification derived from the present,—all this greeted the ears and charmed the hearts of the single-minded and guileless pair whom it was intended to deceive, and who had, in an evil hour, placed themselves and their cause in the hands of an enemy unscrupulous in guilt, undaunted in crime, and unmatched in cunning.

A magnificent entertainment followed, when every device that ingenuity could contrive was employed to delight the senses and engage the minds of the unsophisticated mountaineers, whom this display of splendour was calculated to astonish. In the retirement of her chamber, that night, Queen Jeanne threw herself into the arms of her son, and exclaimed, "Oh, my beloved Henry! what have I now to wish. The bloodshed and cruelty which have so long disgraced and desolated these fair realms, are at an end, and peace is now as undoubted as dearly welcome."

"Heaven grant it, dearest mother!" answered Henry. "We are indeed fortunate. But I should like to see my bride elect, for all this is nothing without her."

Queen Jeanne's countenance was instantly overcast. She had observed the absence of the principal person concerned in their visit, and she had noticed likewise the agitated expression of Catherine's face, as she replied to her inquiries after the Princess.

Jeanne's thoughts in a moment ran back over a series of years. She recalled the time when her warm-hearted and confiding husband had journeyed to Paris, on the death of Henry II.; and no welcome greeted him, no one met him on his road, no feasts were prepared for him, no palaces decorated to receive him; but his very baggage was allowed to remain unsheltered in the court-yard of the house he entered, and this same Queen Catherine had received him almost as an alien. She reverted to the schemes and plots laid to entrap and to annoy him; the endeavours

to withhold from him his dues ; the injuries, the vexations, the deceptions that had driven him from the court of the infant King ; the enmities of the Guises and Lorraines ; and, above all, she remembered with a shudder, Anthony of Navarre's last injunctions to herself, never to trust in Catherine.

All this a flash of thought brought before her, but she shook off the feeling it conjured up, and conversed with her son on the probable results of their present negotiations, and the marriage which must inevitably seal a bond of union, which it would be the mutual interest of each party to keep inviolate.

Henry and his mother, therefore, separated, full of anticipations, which the lately concluded peace, afterwards justly called "*La Paix Boiteuse*," seemed to promise them.

Catherine de Medicis had also sought the retirement of her private apartments, fatigued, more than was her wont, with the demonstrations she had found it necessary to make of her friendliness and hospitality. A few only of her confidential ladies attended her: her step was disordered, and her brow lowering, as she paced backwards and forwards in uncontrolled agitation.

"Is it possible," she exclaimed, passionately, "that the plans I have arranged with such care, are to be ruined by the wilfulness of a headstrong girl? This slight must be instantly repaired. Did any of you observe when Marguerite quitted our company on the road from Paris?"

There was some hesitation amongst the ladies, before an answer was returned by Madame Claude de Lorraine, that the horses, litters and *coches* of the Queen-mother being before those of the Princess and her suite, her having suddenly quitted them, instead of pursuing with them the road to Blois, had been unobserved.

"I can trust nobody but Bianco," said the Queen pettishly ; "send for him instantly. His wit must find a remedy for this business. René," she continued, addressing, as he entered, a remarkably handsome man, whose complexion told that he was her countryman,— "go, instantly, to Chenonceau,—I cannot trust myself to write to Marguerite: I cannot send any of my gentle-

men, for I would not have it known that she has acted from caprice, but it is most important that she should delay no further. You can do much—remember, she is impetuous, proud, and self-willed; be careful not to irritate her: humour her as you can, but gain her promise to come instantly to Blois,—nay, leave her not till she enters this chamber, and when once here I will take care that she escapes me not again. The night has not far waned, you will doubless find her dreaming over childish pleasures,—literature, poetry!—when a kingdom is at stake! draw her from them, use every means, but let me hear that she has entered these gates by morning's dawn."

He to whom the Queen-mother addressed these words in a hurried and passionate accent, bowed low, but replied not by words. The bright glance of his significant eye, however, expressed determination and promptitude. Catherine paused before him for one moment, and then with a smile of peculiar, satisfied meaning, waved her hand, and her messenger had quitted her presence. "And now," said the Queen, "let the King my son know that I await his visit. Every one may retire; and while his Grace is here, be careful that I have no interruption."

Charles was shortly afterwards announced, and entered, his pale countenance lighted up with unusual gaiety. His step was light, and his eye full of mirth, as, hastening to his mother, he kissed her hand, and then casting himself on a couch, gave way to an uncontrollable fit of merriment. Catherine took a seat beside him and watched this ebullition, while a slight smile curled her lip. When he was in some degree recovered, he said,—"Well, madam, tell me candidly, do you not think I have acted my part to admiration?"

"Yes, Charles," said his mother, "your conduct has been faultless; it remains only to be followed up."

"Oh!" cried the King, with renewed laughter, "leave that to me: you will see with what skill I will draw them into the net. I have sent letters already to every part of the kingdom, granting these foolish Huguenots more than they demanded. I shall do precisely what my falconer does when he sends his hawks in search of prey. It is

beyond measure ridiculous how they all come to the call, and how thoroughly deceived the mother-bird and her half-fledged birdling are. We had a most satisfactory and confidential interview before we parted for the night."

"And to what subject did you chiefly lead?" asked Catherine anxiously.

"We talked of Marguerite," said Charles.—The Queen frowned. "That young haggard, by the way, had nearly destroyed all to-day by her absence, but I expatiated on her modesty, ha, ha!—on her timidity,—and Jeanne seemed satisfied. It amused me not a little that she could picture to herself Margot such an awkward frightened thing as her own daughter, who but for that, would be handsome, as De Soissons observed. The credulous mother of our affianced bridegroom suggested that the Pope's dispensation might be long to obtain. 'No, no,' said I, 'my own dearest aunt, my darling friend, I honour you more than pope or cardinal; and as for my sister, I love her better than I fear the power of Rome. If the Pope is fool enough to oppose my will, I here declare to you that I will take Margot by the hand and lead her to the altar in despite of the whole conclave.' She laughed at this. 'I am not a Protestant, as you know, dear aunt,' I continued with a sigh, which had great effect, 'but I am no bigot: I have given my promise, and my word is sacred.' I then took occasion to praise her son, who looks like a young bear from his own mountains, scared by hunters; and, in short, I have left her and our Marguerite's husband elect thoroughly satisfied with all things."

"I trust so, my son," said Catherine. "To-morrow we shall have Marguerite here: we must amuse and humour her for the time, but I fear some outburst of thoughtless folly on her part. I dread the ridicule she will probably cast on this young Bearnois, who is certainly quite unworthy of her."

"Oh she has plenty of lovers to amuse her; what can her husband signify?" said Charles, carelessly. "As for him, it is clear he is a fool whom we can mould at will. We need not waste a thought on him, at all events."

The mother and son on this parted with mutual con-

gratulations, and retired to concoct fresh schemes of deception, which should render the escape of their unsuspecting victims impossible.

CHAPTER II.

LA LUNE.

" J'aural toujours au cœur écrite
Sur toutes fleurs la Marguerite ! "
Le Blason de la Marguerite.

MARGUERITE DE VALOIS was at this period in the very zenith of that beauty which was the theme of admiration throughout France, and the inspiration of all the poets of the time: her influence was felt and acknowledged wherever she appeared, and, where she chose to exert it, rarely resisted. She was totally without her mother's ambition, — to her were unknown her mother's cruelty and harshness; all she seemed to have inherited from her was her power of fascination. She possessed warmth of heart, generosity and tenderness, with a fund of good-humour, and a carelessness beyond bounds. Like her aunt and namesake, the accomplished sister of Francis the First, she delighted in the society of the learned and distinguished, spent much of her time in elegant literary pursuits, and was a munificent patroness of genius and talent. Witty, spirited, full of observation and humour, ever pleased with novelty, ever seeking fresh objects of admiration, instructed even beyond her period, acute and rapid in her conclusions — all her bright qualities were dimmed by an inordinate love of admiration, and a vanity which carried her into every kind of imprudence. Self-gratification was the end and aim of her existence, and this weakness had been fostered by her mother, who dreaded the appearance of talent in all her children, jealously alive to the possibility of their interfering with her ambitious projects.

Never had Marguerite been hitherto known to allow serious thoughts or duties to interfere with her enjoy-

ments; and if they were forced upon her she dismissed them as soon as possible, resolving that they should not cloud the bright sky of the paradise she endeavoured to create for herself. Too exalted in station to care for the cavilling of the vulgar — too thoughtless by nature to be impressed by the world's censure — independent of every one — brought up in an atmosphere of luxury and dissipation, she was the slave or the empress of pleasure.

Her manners were seducing to a degree that surpassed belief; her smile was a spell, her beauty dazzling, and her power of fascination unquestioned. The court over which she presided, and which was one exclusively her own, seemed to combine all that can be imagined of enchantment, ease, happiness and liberty. This fairy court was now held at the beautiful palace of Chenonceau, on the Cher, which, though the Queen-mother loved frequently to reside there, she had given up for the present to the Princess, — her views and occupations making it desirable that she should always be near the King, who had on more occasions than one evinced a desire to emancipate himself from the thraldom of her presence, and to act for himself.

The reminiscences of her father's celebrated and lovely mistress, Diana, which might have been unpleasing to a daughter of a different frame of mind, only served as an example to confirm her in her resolution to lead a life of uninterrupted enjoyment; and the halls of Chenonceau, never in the time of the fair favourite herself, could vie with the glories and enchantments with which its present deity loved to invest them.

Marguerite had consented to the union proposed to her by her ambitious and designing mother, because she was aware that her birth entailed upon her the penalty of being sacrificed to secure some supposed political good. Although, to a certain extent, indifferent as to who might be the husband chosen for her, she was particularly averse from becoming the wife of one whom she looked upon as her inferior in breeding, in manners, and in education. Refined to fastidiousness, outward seeming was to her a chief recommendation; and the accounts she had heard

of the young mountaineer were not calculated to excite any desire in her mind to hasten the fulfilment of their contract. When therefore she, in obedience to her mother's injunctions, set out with the royal party from Paris to Blois, it was with extreme reluctance; and as she felt the fresh air of the country breathe on her brow, the thought occurred to her that never could the romantic retreat of Chenonceau be more enticing than at this moment, when the groves must be full of nightingales and the gardens blazing with countless flowers, all wooing her visit and reproaching her absence. Accordingly she proposed to the gay party, as thoughtless and fond of excitement as herself, all devoted to her wishes and glad to escape the formalities which they anticipated at Blois, that they should turn aside from the road they had intended to take, and shape their course to the palace on the Cher.

Thither the joyous cavalcade pursued their way; and while at the castle of Blois the gorgeous preparations were in full vigour for the reception of her intended husband, she left the care of all to others more interested in the event, and, to the inexpressible mortification of her mother, betook herself to her shades, surrounded by all that wit, talent, and mirth could furnish to render her sojourn a terrestrial paradise.

The night was far spent, the glories of the moon in its height of splendour irradiated the gardens of the famous bower of Diana; an atmosphere of perfume rose from the surrounding flowers and shrubs; and the chequered light which streamed through the foliage of the young trees was reflected from the bosom of a transparent lake, in the midst of which rose a fountain of delicately carved white marble, whose jets formed themselves into the semblance of feathers and flowers, and caught rainbow hues from the rays that glimmered above and around. Light arcades of Moorish architecture, formed of various-coloured marbles, supported innumerable small lamps depending from slender silver chains, which, waved to and fro by the gentle night-breeze, seemed like so many fire-flies in motion. At the extremity of the lake a pile of natural rocks had been taken advantage of by art, and the waters of a stream

had been guided to fall over them in numerous cascades. Here and there, in the hollows of the grey and moss-grown stone, lamps had been introduced, and, as the waters came tumbling over the dark masses, their glow-worm light shimmered and glittered through the dancing spray. A hundred nightingales sang and answered each other in the neighbouring woods, and were heard in the pauses of the lute, which accompanied some voice as soft as their own, while their rapturous chorus acknowledged the skill of the musician which they strove to excel by louder and more persevering melody. The weather was such as is sometimes met with at the close of spring, intensely, yet deliciously warm, and the sky so clear that it seemed as though no clouds could ever be known in a region so bright and blest.

The beautiful Marguerite and her ladies were formed to enjoy such a scene, and they gave themselves entirely up to its charm, banishing all thoughts foreign to its enchanting influence, and forgetting for the time that there existed a world beyond. Ronsard, the king of poets and the favourite of kings, the adored of the Muses and the pride of France, the glory of his native Loire, and the deity of *La Lune*, was there. He sang his own verses in a voice all passion. What he wanted in science and in power was amply made up in exquisite feeling and expression, and none who heard him with breathless and spell-bound attention, but wondered they could ever listen to other strains.

His quick transitions from pathetic to cheerful pleased every heart, and found admirers in every listener. Now he addressed extemporary verses to the goddess of the place, then alluded with quick thought to passing events of the day, poured forth soft compliments to each fair one in turn, and proved himself as good a courtier as a poet. Nor was the learning forgotten for which he had attained so high a reputation, and which was at that period so highly prized, though its display has since justly caused his works to be considered pedantic. But who should venture to criticise the master minstrel, who had purified the language, and introduced so many classical graces?

So far from it, his delighted auditors were intoxicated with enthusiasm, and the enjoyment of the night was at its height, when an attendant approached the Princess, and whispered in her ear.

She started. "Not now," she said; "it is impossible: were it the King himself, or my mother in person, I would not admit them.—Say, I will give audience to-morrow to any one from Blois, but not to-night. Oh! divine Ronsard, sing again;—why should anything of the world without intrude to break the spell you have cast over our souls?"

"No, madam," said the poet; "if my songs deserve the praises you have showered upon them, the poet merits a reward; and mine shall be to hear you sing, to listen to accents such as we only have the privilege of hearing, and such as never even bless the dreams of those beyond our paradise."

"Give me a lute," said Marguerite, "and let me try, if the fearful thought of the chain preparing for me have not altogether scared away my powers. But the verse, dear Ronsard, shall be thy own, and must delight, even if my voice should fail. How can it fail when I sing the lays of him whose natural bed was of flowers, and over whom the Muses themselves poured from enchanted urns the rosy water of inspiration!"

The delighted poet acknowledged this complimentary allusion to the legend attached to his infancy with emotion. It had been said of him, that when a child, as his nurse was carrying him across a meadow, he fell from her arms into the midst of the flowers which grew there in profusion, and that a damsel who was passing by, bearing a vase of rosewater, as she stooped to lift up the smiling infant, deluged him with the contents. This was considered a presage of his future fame and excellence, and was frequently mentioned by his admirers.

The Princess, with a fervour and delicacy which excited in her hearers all the enthusiasm which she herself felt, then sang a celebrated song from the "Amours" of the great poet.

"Fifteen lovely childish springs,
Hair of gold in crisped rings,
Cheek and lips with roses spread,
Smile, that to the stars can lead;
Grace, whose every turn can please;
Virtue, worthy charms like these;
Breast, within whose virgin snows
Lies a gentle heart that glows
'Mid the sparkling thoughts of youth,
All divine, with steady truth;
Eyes, that make a day of night;
Hands, whose touch so soft and light
Hold my soul a prisoner long;
Voice, whose soft, entrancing song,
Now a smile, and now a sigh,
Interrupts melodiously! —
These are charms, within whose spell
All my peace and reason dwell." *

After the applause had died away with which this poem had been received, Etienne Jodelle, the accomplished poet, painter, sculptor and architect, whose devotion to the mighty master kept pace with that of his warmest admirers, recited some of his own compositions, and was followed by Baïf, also a poet of the school and a worthy pupil of Ronsard. Jodelle soon after begged to introduce to the company a young minstrel, destined afterwards to become celebrated, but who was at this period not more than sixteen, — handsome, elegant, and full of genius. He was named to the gratified Princess as a new candidate for her favour, and some jests were circulated when it was remarked that the young Du Perron was a Calvinist; and the coincidence of his arrival at the present moment might be considered propitious, as the Protestant bridegroom of his patroness could not object to him on the score of religion.

"Alas!" said Marguerite, with feigned gravity, "I fear the Muses will forswear me in future — the snows of Bearn will chill them, and they will forsake me. Can any tell me in what semblance my tyrant appears — has any seen him? — what says he — what does he, besides hunt, and eat, and fight? — Has he any quality to fit him for our world, or must we bar its entrance to him at once?"

A soft voice near the Princess whispered, "If your Highness would really like to know, you have only to admit Bianco, the Italian, who waits without with some

* See "Specimens of the Early Poetry of France." — 1835.

message from Blois: he is not a bad painter, nor does he want wit to set off his colouring."

She who spoke, and while she did so, blushed deeply, was the young and lovely Marie de Cleves, about the age, and nearly answering to the description which the poet had given in the lines they had just heard, and in which he probably sought to paint her. She had approached softly from a grove of orange trees, where she had been apparently occupied in attending to the animated communication of a young page of the Duke of Anjou, who, on leaving her, retired quickly, and was lost amidst the surrounding shades. She held in her hand a billet, which bore a seal, the device on which was a vessel and star, with the words *Te duce*, at which she hastily glanced, not unobserved, but unnoticed, and thrust it into her bosom.

The advice given by the beautiful Marie, for which she doubtless had her reasons, was listened to at once by the volatile Princess.

"Bianco, did you say?" exclaimed she,—why did I refuse him admittance? He has talents beyond his station, and his powers of jesting are of no ordinary character. He shall describe to us all that we have missed seeing by our *escapade;* he shall speak of our lords and masters; you, Marie, and I, who are fellow victims, must hear him with attention. You must chide Anjou, that he has deserted us for our enemies;—or will you depute that office to the expectant Prince de Condé?" The face of Marie became so pale as to alarm her friend,—"What folly have I said?" she whispered softly.—"Alas! I forget that all have not their hearts unscathed, as I have! Ah! my friend, you are preparing for yourself a future of care. Believe me, it is well to adorn the heart with painted pictures of love, but not to engrave them upon it;—but I speak as one who never loved, and one, I feel, who never can."

"How!" said Marie; "is there not one amongst all those who adore you who claims one thought?"

"Yes," answered Marguerite, gaily, "many; nay, perhaps all in turn, but the vision passes away as quickly as a shadow on a mirror: my heart is so transparent, that it

takes all impressions and retains none. But, we are serious,—let us all return to the river gallery where our repast awaits us: we will summon René, and add another amusement to the night."

The gay party immediately obeyed her signal; and some, in laughing groups, strolled leisurely along the perfumed banks of the *château*, while others entered the glittering skiffs which were moored along the shore for their accommodation, and glided down the stream to the marble steps that conducted them to the singularly beautiful apartment which Catherine de Medicis had constructed above the arches of the bridge which spanned the Cher. Its windows now shone with innumerable lights, and within was displayed a splendid banquet. When the party were all assembled, a concert of soft music rose from boats stationed beneath, and *aubades* and serenades, for the hour suited either night or morning, accompanied by instruments of various sorts, continued at intervals during the repast. Bianco, the messenger of the Queen-mother, was introduced, and with infinite tact avoided betraying the extreme anxiety of his mistress, who, he represented, merely asked her daughter's presence, as she was sure the novelty of the scene, and the variety of characters she would behold, would interest her extremely. He then touched on peculiar traits of several of the distinguished persons who accompanied Queen Jeanne, seizing the ridiculous, and making the eccentric so prominent, that he convulsed his inconsiderate hearers with laughter. He was too politic, however, to say anything about the principal actors in the drama, but contrived so artfully to excite curiosity, that Marguerite was completely won; and before they separated, she had agreed, that with all her suite she would repair early on the following morning to Blois.

CHAPTER III.

CAJOLERY.

"Oh! dark deceit, with painted face for show,
Oh! feigned friend, deceiving people so!"
THOS. CHURCHYARD.

QUEEN JEANNE was seated near one of the carved windows of the *château*, which overlooked a huge round tower and the bastioned walls of that portion of the building whose severe architecture proclaimed their Roman origin, and whose solid and unornamented extent formed a remarkable contrast with the light and elaborately adorned façade opposite, on which all the taste of Francis I. and his successors had been lavished; where, from stage to stage, the art of the builder was displayed in gorgeous tracery, more remarkable for its variety than congruous effect. Here a range of windows was connected by gracefully twisted and fluted pillars, whose richly foliaged capitals supported tablets filled with classical figures in bold relief; beyond, the character changed, and the hand of an earlier architect was perceptible; grotesque heads peeped from the cornices, and extravagant forms wreathed themselves into harmony, to form a graceful termination to some spire or *tourelle*.

An immense court beneath was adorned with gardens, laid out with taste and filled with choice flowers: overtopping the outer walls rose the towers of the church of the Jesuits, frowning, as it were, on the regal splendour which it commanded. A shade of melancholy reflection was on the fine features of Jeanne de Navarre, as she marked the pleased interest with which her son and his young companion, the Prince de Condé, were watching the manœuvres of some troops in the great square opposite; and as she withdrew her glance it fell on the form of her daughter Catherine, who, seated on a low stool at her feet, was gazing up in her face.

"Are you thinking of our mountains, too?" said Jeanne, half smiling. "Your face seems a reflection of my own, and so perhaps are your thoughts."

"Dear mother," answered the young Princess, "I shall never love any place so well. Yet how beautiful and rich is every thing about us, and how kind are the Queen-mother and her ladies!"

"And the young cavaliers, Catherine?" said her brother; "you say nothing of them. I wonder which amongst them will be so fortunate as to please my pretty sister?"

"They are very agreeable, no doubt," said Catherine, blushing; "but I do not like their air of condescension and superiority."

"What think you of the Count de Soissons, with whom you danced last night?" asked Henry.

Catherine blushed still more, and turned away as she said, "Oh, least of all I like him; he spoke to me as if it were necessary to lower the tone of his conversation to suit my ignorance."

"You are singular, Catherine," said her mother; "for he is thought one of the most attractive gallants at court."

"There are many others equally so, I think," replied the Princess, "and less supercilious."

"You are severe, little critic," cried Henry, "and have already made progress in court manners, which I fear I never shall do. I am far more at home in camp: nevertheless one may amuse one's self here." He whispered to Condé, who smiled gaily at his remarks, and at that moment a messenger from the Queen-mother was announced, and the doors being thrown open the envoy himself appeared, who approached and knelt at the feet of the Queen of Navarre.

This personage was René Bianco, the Florentine, whose offices with his royal mistress were so many and various, that it was almost impossible positively to pronounce what position he held. Now little more than a menial, and now little less than an ambassador, Catherine employed him in negotiations of importance to the state, and in trivial messages to her favourites and her ladies. His insinuating address and remarkably handsome exterior rendered him, if not welcome, at least tolerated, more especially in the

latter capacity. It was more than whispered that his science as a chemist was that which chiefly recommended him to his royal mistress, who, in common with most persons of all ranks in that age, sought diligently after the hidden secrets of nature, and left no means unemployed to discover her mysteries. A certain degree of suspicion and some feeling of awe attended him, though it was rather in his absence than his presence, for his ready wit and fluent conversation were not calculated to inspire other than agreeable thoughts. It was only in the occasional glance of his dark, sparkling, and deeply-set eye that might be detected a sinister character, and a searching and eager expression at variance with his frank and joyous manner.

Bianco was the bearer to Queen Jeanne of a token from his mistress of a pair of perfumed and richly embroidered gloves, then an article of great luxury, and a bouquet of choice flowers, arranged so that the delicate blossoms appeared like a star in the centre, and round it sprang leaves of the olive, the laurel, and the cypress: a silver riband bound the whole, on which was embroidered, in letters of precious stones, the motto which Jeanne had adopted, in allusion to the state of her affairs, — "SAFE PEACE, VICTORY, OR HONOURABLE DEATH."

Bianco respectfully presented this, at the same time expressing the compliments with which he was charged by Catherine. "My mistress," he said, "orders me to say that she sends your Grace these flowers in token of the love that springs from the centre of her heart for you and yours, and which will be her guiding star in time to come. You have granted her Peace, and she sends you the Olive; you have gained the victory over civil war, and she sends you the Laurel; you have put to death every hatred and malice, and she sends you the Cypress."

Queen Jeanne received the present most graciously, and a blush passed over her face as she remembered the thoughts she could not entirely banish.

"And to your Grace," continued René, kneeling to young Henry, "I am charged to deliver a sealed packet, which will explain itself; only venturing to add, that — as she who sends it bade me say, that — as the *daisy* looks

up towards the god of morning for life and joy, so she looks towards you."

Henry, not without emotion, broke the seal, and discovered a bunch of enamelled *marguerites*, which he immediately transferred to his bosom with a gallant gesture, and thanked the messenger with a frank smile.

As René rose from his knee, an attendant entered the apartment, and proclaimed the approach of King Charles, who, advancing hastily and without ceremony to Queen Jeanne, saluted her with all the apparent natural enthusiasm of youth, throwing his arms about her, and uttering the tenderest expressions of affection,—calling her, with almost infantine playfulness, his *own aunt*, his *all*, his *beloved*,—till, overcome with his kindness, the good Queen could not suppress her tears, and a feeling of faintness crept over her, as the bouquet of Catherine, to which she had been smelling, dropped from her hand, and she leant back in his arms for support. Her daughter and her son were instantly at her side. Bianco removed the flowers, and presented to Charles an essence which instantly revived her: then, bowing low, he retired. As he left the chamber, charged with the grateful acknowledgments of the Queen of Navarre to Catherine, young Henry, still occupied with his mother, looked suddenly up, and was struck with the reflection in an opposite mirror of a countenance in which gratified malevolence and hatred were so strongly depicted, that it appeared as if the face of a fiend had looked upon him. He started with a thrill of horror, but before he could account in any way for the apparition, it was gone; and as he had not noticed the departure of Bianco, he was not aware that the glass gave back his features.

"Dearest aunt, we have excited and worn your spirits too much," tenderly exclaimed Charles; "I would my good nurse Mabille were here to tend you. We will send instantly to Paris for her; she is the kindest and best of women, and will nurse you as she does her own child, for such she calls me. But surely you must know Mabille; she is your countrywoman, it was from you my mother had her first."

"Oh yes, my dear cousin!" answered Jeanne with

animation, "if it be Mabille Rolland, she is indeed a worthy creature; but many years have passed since I have seen her. It was but lately that I sent a young man, an orphan whom I protect, to Paris, and recommended him to her care while in your dangerous city."

"Ah, my own sweet aunt!" exclaimed Charles laughing,—"you country people have such strange ideas of our Paris. But we are harmless, depend upon it, or will prove, at least to you, how happy we can be in the midst of our wickedness, and how well the air of my Catholic capital can agree with my beloved heretics. My good cousin," he continued, addressing Henry, "you will, I fear, seduce us from our duties; for my own part, I do not mean to fast for a month to come,—and as to confession," he added in a lower tone, "all the confession we will think of shall be that of love. To-night we have a masque, where your courage, young knight, will be severely tried; and I must tell you at once Margot is arrived, and expiring till she sees you at her feet. It is time that I introduce you; my mother waits her Grace's pleasure to present a daughter to her."

As he spoke, music was heard without; the broad curtains of the tapestry which adorned the lower part of the chamber were drawn aside, and two long lines of attendant nobles and ladies were discovered on each side of a spacious gallery, from the upper end of which advanced, through a richly-decorated hall, the Queen-mother and the Princess Marguerite, led by the Duke of Anjou, and followed by a train of ladies all gorgeously attired except the Princess herself, who wore a remarkably plain riding-dress, and whose countenance was clouded with discontent.

The long-desired meeting now took place; but to those who looked on, it was evident that there was neither pleasure nor cordiality in the salute given and received by the beautiful and haughty bride elect, who, in the coldest and briefest manner, replied to the kind address of Queen Jeanne and the frank but timid compliment of her son, whom she scarcely appeared to notice, and, as soon as possible, turned from them and busied herself in conver-

sation with the nobles and ladies round her. To Henry's inexperienced eye the carelessness of Marguerite's toilet was indifferent; not so to that of Queen Jeanne. whose quick apprehension saw in it studied neglect, a circumstance which instantly alarmed her pride.

From day to day, as fête succeeded fête, and every demonstration of attachment was exhibited to lull suspicion and create confidence, the feelings of Queen Jeanne experienced a change, till at length, instead of beholding in this display the friendship which was professed, her doubts grew into strength, and her mind became a prey to terrors and regret, which she could not overcome. Catherine's experience soon told her that she had overacted the part she had undertaken, and was suspected.

Charles, whose mind was excited in a manner which bordered on delirium, by the stirring future which he pictured to himself, was restlessly desirous of removing from Blois to the scene of some glorious action, which he felt was on the eve of being accomplished. He, therefore, readily agreed to his mother's proposition, and preparations were instantly made to remove the court to the Louvre, where a series of entertainments was preparing, superior to any which had yet been given, in honour of the approaching nuptials of Henry and Marguerite.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROTÉGÉ.

"Mine was a proud dejection, and an unquiet weariness, — that is, sinking down the more by how much the more my pride aspired to raise me up."
ST. AUGUSTIN.

THE young orphan whom Jeanne of Navarre had mentioned to King Charles as being under her protection, and whom she had lately sent to Paris, was called Claude Emars. His childhood had been passed at the simple court of Navarre. Only a few years older than the young

prince, Claude had been chosen by Jeanne as one of his companions, and in all the daring adventures in which Henry delighted to engage he was at his side. To both, the haunts of the eagle and the bear were known, and neither shrank from the ravine or the torrent which must be passed in order to pursue their mountain sport. The noble and generous-hearted Prince was beloved by all his associates, and he had frequently distinguished Claude from the rest, not only on account of the resolution and bravery he displayed on all occasions, but because there hung over his birth an obscurity which excited his compassion and sympathy.

A few years before the events occurred with which this narrative opens, Claude Emars entered the college of Navarre, and, his studies concluded, his kind protectress had arranged that he should become secretary to Bailly, the President of the Chamber of Accounts.

It was with feelings of delight, such as youth alone experiences, that Claude one morning received a summons from Madame Mabille Rolland, the King's nurse, the only person who in the great city of Paris had any interest in him, and whose motherly attentions, while he had been at college, had attached him to her with tender gratitude. On his way to the apartments which were allotted to her in the palace of the Louvre, as he passed along the crowded streets, gay with preparation for approaching festivities, he was lost in admiration of every thing he saw.

Having but rarely quitted his studious abode since he first left the mountains which had become native to him, every object that met his view appeared fraught with wonder and beauty. He paused frequently on his way to gaze on the sumptuous buildings which the magic wands of Delorme and Brillant had called into being, and was greatly struck with the extent of the enormous structure of the arsenal, then newly completed; but his admiration was at its height when he reached the magnificent pile of the Louvre, rising in gorgeous majesty beside the river, whose tide proudly reflected its towers. The lately erected palace of the Tuileries, on which the Queen-mother had bestowed so much care and pains, and where she now

feared to reside in consequence of a prophecy which threatened danger to her *from St. Germain,* in which parish it was situated, excited his amazement at so much cost and splendour.

By degrees, as he became accustomed to the brilliant scene, his thoughts, hitherto absorbed in wondering admiration, were led into a train of sad reflection as they fell back upon himself; and when he stopped at the door of Mabille's apartments his eyes were filled with tears.

She was instantly struck with the difference in his demeanour from what she had been accustomed to observe, and with the quick apprehension of affectionate regard, questioned him as to the cause of his evident depression.

"I fear I am selfish, dear Mabille," said he, "that instead of my heart bounding with joy and delight at all the splendour I behold, I am thinking of myself. What am I in this pageant of the world?—an orphan—a nameless and insignificant being, ignorant of myself and of my birth; a worthless atom in the great scale!"

"Claude," said Mabille gravely but kindly, "you speak inconsiderately: no one is worthless in the eyes of heaven; the accident of birth does not always secure distinction; and we have all much more to be grateful for than to repine at in our destiny. You are protected by a generous and good princess; you have open before you a career of learning,—perhaps of fame. Would that the fate of all those of our religion were as secure as you may be in the insignificance which you deplore!"

"Mabille," answered Claude, suddenly shaking off the sadness which hung upon him, "I should indeed have thought of others.—Tell me of the King and of good Queen Jeanne."

"You shall see them in a few moments," said Mabille, "for it is by the Queen herself that you are sent for."

"Oh, my dear Mabille," replied Claude, again relapsing into melancholy, "think me not ungrateful while I conceal from you no part of my feelings. I had hoped to be permitted to embrace the career of arms, rather than to lead a life of quiet and inactivity."

"But, Claude," said the nurse, "remember that the sword is sheathed;—and Heaven grant it may long be so!"

Their conversation was here interrupted by a summons to attend the Queen of Navarre, and Claude, in the delight of again beholding his benefactress, soon forgot every thing beside. It was arranged by that considerate and indulgent princess that her young *protégé* should remain in her establishment till the period fixed for his admission to the family of the President Bailly, in order that he might be a witness of and partaker in all the gaieties which were now the sole occupation of the entire population of the pleasure-loving city of Paris.

CHAPTER V.

THE ACCIDENT.

"I was requesting you to come no more
And mock me with your service. 'Tis not well."
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

THOUGH it was always the policy of Catherine de Medicis to encourage every kind of amusement in the capital, and continual fêtes, even in the midst of the civil contests which raged without, enlivened the stately halls of the regal palace, yet at this moment mirth and gaiety seemed altogether to have taken up their abode in the brilliant city. Night after night, galas, public and private, made the air ring with music and festivity; the gardens were a perpetual illumination, and to be gloomy appeared the only crime in that happy place. The near approach of the nuptials which were to unite the contending parties in blissful accord, was the theme of all discourse, the object of all celebration; — the names of Henry and Marguerite were sung in concert, and wreathed in garlands, wherever a voice or hand could be heard or employed. The grateful and well-pleased citizens, happy in the anticipation of tranquillity, readily contributed the sums levied upon them, and a general feeling of contentment seemed to pervade all classes.

It was on one of the most gorgeous of these festive entertainments that Claude found himself amongst the gay crowd in the gardens of the new palace of the Tuileries. The whole extent of the wide avenues was one blaze of rainbow light; gleaming from amidst orange and myrtle and pomegranate groves, were numerous groups of marble statues, selected by the refined taste of the Queen, and brought from her native Italy at great cost. Columns of sparkling water shot up in spiral lines towards the sky, and fell back with gentle murmurs into richly-carved basins, round which bloomed a profusion of the choicest flowers. Fireworks of rare beauty sent up their tongues and stars of flame far above the trees, and each burst was greeted by the delighted multitude with shouts of admiration. In different parts of the gardens were stationed concealed musicians, who attracted enthusiastic attention; and the feats of a party of rope-dancers were hailed with the most rapturous applause. But while the vaulters were in the midst of their performance, a cry arose that a still greater attraction awaited the curious, for it was rumoured that the royal party from the Louvre were entering that part of the gardens which had been portioned off to enable them to walk in procession before the eyes of their gratified subjects. In a few moments the loud acclamations of "The King! the Queen!—the bride!" proclaimed that the eager wishes of the assembled multitude might be gratified by beholding all the regal hosts, with their distinguished guests, as they paced with stately steps along the alley of flowering shrubs which had been arranged for the display.

A burst of music, and a sudden discharge of fireworks, more brilliant than any which had preceded them, indicated the arrival of the party; and loud was the outcry, and violent the struggle to obtain situations most favourable for a view of the objects of so much curiosity. Some of the most anxious of the spectators mounted on scaffolds and stools piled on each other, while some earnest gazers clung to the depending branches of the trees, and raised themselves amongst the boughs. Claude had adopted the latter method, and was enjoying the sight of the splendid

coruscations of fire that whirled above him, and blazed on the path of the jewelled party who were passing, when shrieks were uttered from amongst the crowd, and it was discovered that a large temporary building, representing the temple of Hymen, was on fire, and the flames were seen mounting above the trees, borne by the breeze amongst the multitude, threatening destruction to all within their reach. Great was the confusion which instantly prevailed; a rush was made by some towards, and by others from, the spot, and screams and exclamations filled the air. Claude leaped from his exalted station, and, borne along by the crowd, was hurried he scarce knew whither, when he perceived a party of people surrounding the body of a man who lay extended on the ground, having been dragged from under a mingled mass of planks and fallen bodies: by his side knelt a young girl, whose gestures bespoke extreme terror; she was calling distractedly on her father, and entreating assistance from those around. But the confusion had by this time become appalling, and those who had assisted the fallen man were driven away by alarm, which magnified their own danger, and each new account added to the general panic. Claude, with much labour, succeeded in defending the young female and her apparently lifeless companion from the pressure of the crowd, and was nearly exhausted with exertion, when, having cleared a small space, he contrived to raise him in his arms, and calling to the daughter to cling closely to him, he bore along his senseless burthen to an open part of the gardens, and, laying him by the side of a fountain, proceeded, with the help of his young companion, to administer remedies for his relief.

At length, to the great joy of both, the injured man gave signs of recovery, and, heaving a deep sigh, half opened his eyes: the first words he uttered struck Claude with surprise, and he felt a shudder creep over him as these sentences were indistinctly articulated; "Down with the Huguenots!—leave none alive of the infidel race!—give me the sword—never heed their cries!" Other words died away upon his lips, while his daughter, regardless of all but the certainty that he still lived, embraced him with

transport, and Claude began to consider the best means of removing him.

"The litter in which we came to this unfortunate place," said the young lady, when her agitation would permit her to reply to his questions, "was to await us at the south gate of the gardens; but how shall we reach it, with my father in this state?"

"Have you courage to remain here with him while I seek it?" asked Claude.

"Oh, yes, yes," cried she; "go instantly, I entreat."

Claude was hurrying away, when he suddenly recollected that he was ignorant of the names of those whom he had assisted, and he returned to make so necessary an inquiry.

"The President Bailly," said the young lady; and Claude, with an exclamation of surprise, darted away towards the south gate.

Many amongst the crowd were still pressing to escape from the gardens; others, finding that the accident had been exaggerated, were returning to the scene of the late festivity in the more haste, as they feared to have lost the sights for which they were so anxious, so that he was some time before he found it possible to reach the desired spot. As he was gazing round him in much perplexity, he heard his name pronounced, by René Bianco, with whom he had become acquainted during his stay in the hotel of the Queen of Navarre.

Bianco was one of those persons who seem to possess a fascinating power without any moral virtue in their minds giving cause for the dominion which they exercise; on the contrary, there was an occasional hardihood in his sentiments, and a licence in his conversation, which at times startled the pure nature of Claude, and made him draw back from his offered friendship: he had always therefore experienced in his society a mixed feeling; he was amused by his wit and gaiety, pleased with his superior knowledge of the world, and his sarcasm and unexpected remarks on passing events; but he was conscious, nevertheless, of a degree of mistrust, bordering on alarm, when he looked in his face, and vainly endeavoured to catch the real meaning of his bright, but wandering eye, or to explain the peculiar smile which curled around his well-formed mouth.

He could not help feeling gratified and flattered, that a person, standing in the position that René did, and enjoying the confidence of the Queen-mother, should take pains to conciliate his friendship. Yet, at times, the pride of the unfriended orphan rose against a certain familiarity which he imagined spoke of superiority: he banished, however, this impression as quickly as it was made, reproaching himself with ingratitude and misplaced reserve. All this, however, appeared unnoticed by René, who continued the same tone of civility, in whatever mood he might find his young acquaintance.

"What seek you so earnestly?" said Bianco, as he took the arm of Claude.

"I seek a litter belonging to the President Bailly," answered Claude; "he lies in the gardens dangerously hurt from this accident."

"St. Mary forbid!" exclaimed René, "you may look in vain for his litter; but we can place him in one belonging to some of the Queen's ladies, which waits close at hand."

"A thousand thanks," replied Claude; "come with me and assist in bearing him thither, his daughter will be overjoyed."

"How! — is Alix with her father?" inquired the Italian, in a tone of anxiety. — "Let us not lose a moment."

They accordingly hastened on, and soon arrived at the fountain, where they found the President a little recovered, though unable to walk: they bore him between them to the litter, and his daughter followed with trembling steps. As he was placed carefully in the vehicle, René extended his hand to assist the young lady to ascend, and, for the first time, as the light fell on his face, she saw who offered her his support; she started and shrunk back.

"Is it you, Signor René?" faltered she. "Was it you who saved my father?"

Claude, in anxiety to place the wounded man at ease, heard not the answer given by René.

"I have been so fortunate," said he, in a low tone; "and if my assistance has any merit in the eyes of the lovely Mademoiselle Alix, I am indeed repaid."

"I thank you, Signor. We are most grateful," said Alix, as she threw herself into the seat, and, overcome by the emotion she had experienced, burst into a passion of tears.

In a few minutes Claude saw the litter move off, accompanied by Bianco, and he could not but feel a momentary pang of disappointment, as he lost sight of those whom he had so materially served, without having exchanged with them a word of greeting.

He returned home, through the streets glittering with light and gay with illuminated garlands, and was entering the Rue de Grenelle, in which street, at the hotel of the Bishop of Chartres, the Queen of Navarre had resided since her arrival in Paris, when a poor woman thrust into his hand some pamphlets, at the same time entreating him to purchase them for the sake of the blessed Virgin. He threw her a few pieces and hastened to his apartments, where, exhausted with the fatigue and agitation of the evening, he cast himself upon a couch. The singular manner of his meeting with the President, haunted his imagination, and he tried to form a less vague idea of his daughter. The occasional flashes of light which had fallen on her, had discovered to him a slight and graceful figure, and delicate and peculiarly small white hands; but the tresses of her long dark hair had fallen so entirely over her face, as she bent beside her father, that he had only imperfectly seen her countenance. He now vainly regretted having been so soon separated by the crowd from them. "However," he thought, "in a few days I am to be under the same roof with her, and my wish will be gratified. Bianco, it seems, is known to them. I will ask him to describe her to me minutely."

He was indulging in a variety of reveries, all tending to the same point, when a quick step in the corridor recalled him to himself, and the next moment the Italian entered. "I have seen the President and his daughter to their hotel," said he, "and now come to ascertain how fares their champion, as I return from an embassy to Queen Jeanne, from my Donna Catarina."

Claude instantly loaded him with inquiries, and heard

in answer a description of Mademoiselle Alix, coloured with all the vividness of Italian painting. "Beware how you behold her, '*de la regarder vous gardez;*' but above all beware how you love her," said René, "for I, myself, pretend to the honour of serving this divinity."

"Oh!" said Claude, "you jest; neither of us have a right to cast our eyes so high: the fair Alix would not condescend to regard me, a poor secretary, nor you, a rich perfumer."

This was said carelessly, without any intention of offending, but René bit his lip in mortification, as he replied, "My friend, Claude, you mistake — the house of Medicis itself sprang from one of my calling, — a dealer in drugs; and the favourite of such a mistress as Catherine is not so powerless nor so mean as you seem to imagine."

"Well," said Claude, "I give you joy; for myself, I have not so bright a star."

"Had you ever your nativity calculated?" asked Bianco.

"Not that I know of," answered Claude.

"But I have," said the Italian, gravely; "and I myself have studied the art."

"You cannot really consider it one?" replied the young man.

"Not consider it so!" exclaimed René, with enthusiasm. "I look upon it as a sublime science, difficult of attainment, but worthy of any toil to become master of."

"If you credit prediction," returned Claude, "that delivered at the birth of your Queen Catherine, is scarcely pleasing to record, for it is said the stars threatened evil to the place where she should take up her abode."

"True," said René, in an absent tone, his mind evidently absorbed in the subject; "Basilio declared that she should be raised to the highest dignity the world can bestow."

"Ay, but he added," said Claude, — "for I heard it but yesterday discussed in the public streets, while the Queen was passing in her chariot, — that she would cause the ruin of the country, and of the House into which she

married; but we, of Bearn, pay little attention to the dreams of astrology — had we done so, we should never have left our mountains, for many and great were the evils threatened to our good Queen, if she undertook this journey, which has turned out so happily for her and for France."

While he spoke, Bianco bent his head to conceal a lurking sneer, and busied himself in turning over the leaves of the pamphlets which Claude had received from the poor woman. "Ha!" cried he, suddenly, "what have we here? some of the centuries of the great Michel Nostrodamus, the mathematician. I see, though you profess to despise the noble art, you sometimes amuse yourself with its revelations; and, behold! is there not proof in the first page I take up of the truth of prophecy? Does he not expressly foretel the manner of King Henry the Second's death? Ay, and here is the same predicted by Luc Gauric, who promised the King long life if he escaped the danger that threatened him in the sixty-third and sixty-fourth years of his age. Did not Jerome Cardin say the same, though none dared report it to his Majesty? besides the Jew, who warned him to beware of combat between man and man. My Donna Catarina endeavoured to persuade him not to enter the lists, and to discontinue the jousts after the third day, but in vain."

"What became of the unfortunate Count de Montgomery?" asked Claude. "I heard that Queen Catherine could not forgive his unintentional crime."

"She will never forgive it," said Bianco: "he fled to England, where he was protected, and has since been in arms with your party, — he is in Paris now." As he uttered the last words a gloom passed over the brow of René, and he was silent for a few moments.

Claude continued: "I hold all these predictions as mere visions, adapted but as the event occurs; otherwise they had been entirely forgotten, as they deserve to be."

"But, how say you?" exclaimed his friend; "here is the prophecy of one of your own Huguenots." — He went on reading the title: "'*Words uttered a Twelvemonth since by a Dying Man*,' — 'Peace is made suddenly, and

in our favour: new alliances, treaties, and a marriage. *She* will go to Paris and *die there*. All the nobles will assemble. Events crowd on each other. Oh! what a change! — what treachery! — what cruelty!' By Heaven!" muttered René, drawing his dark brows close over his eyes, — "there is meaning in this."

"Why," said Claude, laughing, "I was just thinking there was none: who can find meaning in such raving?"

"Give me these papers," said Bianco, rising suddenly.

"Willingly," said Claude, "they are entirely useless to me, or to any one, I should imagine."

As he spoke, Claude stooped to collect the pamphlets together, and was handing them to Bianco, when he was struck with the fixed look of intense interest with which he was regarding him.

"You have served, it seems, my young friend," said he; "or do the students at the college of Navarre amuse themselves with war after the fashion of those at St. Germain des Prés?"

"What mean you?" asked Claude, with surprise.

"I allude," answered René, bringing his eye close to his listener's face, "to the broad scar which you bear on your forehead; how came you by it?"

The tone in which the question was asked was so hollow and deep that Claude could not but remark it. — "What," said he, "are you one of those whom wounds affright? I should not have thought it. I never felt the pain of this, for I was an infant when I received it, from a ruffian who, no doubt, intended that the blow should be mortal."

"Strange!" said René; — "how did this happen?"

"Oh!" answered Claude, sadly, "it is a melancholy story; when I first heard it I learnt I was an orphan, — my father was murdered by the same hand that aimed at my life."

"And did Anthony of Navarre adopt you then?" asked René, hurriedly.

"Oh, you have heard my history, I see," said Claude.

"Partially," answered the Italian, turning away, as Claude went on to relate some passages of his early life.

"This chain," he said, taking from his bosom one which he wore, and kissing it, "is all that is left me of a father I never knew."

Bianco bent forward eagerly to examine it, and as he did so touched a spring which Claude had never perceived, and displayed beneath the clasp a wreath of gold flowers, within which was minutely engraved an altar, with the words "*ardo y adoro*," and the initials *G. A.* entwined. Claude uttered an exclamation of surprise, and Bianco, in some confusion, closed the clasp. "All these chains have a secret spring," he said; "I am surprised that you never found this before. But," he added hastily, "in the extreme interest I take in your history I am forgetting my duty. Queen Catherine will be asking for me. Adieu, therefore, my dear Claude, and be not depressed; the time is coming for great events, and in them, depend on it, fortune will not forget you." With these words he quitted the chamber, leaving his companion full of thought and a prey to anxious musings.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MIRROR.

"Come like shadows — so depart." — *Macbeth.*

It was in a small tower chamber in the Hôtel d'Albret, lately finished for her residence, that the Queen-mother was seated alone, after having retired from the gaieties with which she loaded her guests. Here she felt that intrusion was impossible: that here she might allow full scope to the workings of her mind; here, even as her tower commanded Paris, could she command the destinies of its inhabitants and mature her plans of policy and ambition.

The roof of the room was low, its form was octagon, and it was faintly lighted by two extremely narrow pointed windows, from which a wide extent of buildings could be discerned on either side; a small staircase led from the

chamber to the platform above, which, open on all sides, was covered by the dome before mentioned, supported by slender pillars.

The cornices were moulded into forms of great beauty: amidst garlands of grapes, ivy, and fruits, birds, and other small animals were introduced in the manner of an earlier age, and heads of chimeras terminated the projecting edges and pendants. In the centre stood a large table of carved wood, whose supports represented grotesque figures; on this was placed a candelabrum of wrought iron of peculiar construction, from the middle of which rose a large double crucifix; round this were arranged numerous small wax lights, and beneath them were placed tablets of polished wood engraved with astronomical characters, and records of historical dates. Two carved chairs answered to the ornaments of the table, and seemed to indicate that only one guest at a time was admitted into this mysterious apartment. A book of "Heures" lay beside the chandelier, and the light that fell on it displayed its elaborate binding, encrusted with figures representing scenes of human life, minutely executed, and the same subject continued even on the small iron clasps which confined the exquisitely printed pages from the hand of the celebrated Simon Vostre; near this lay a thin volume bound in gilded copper: it was open, and within might be seen figures which spoke a mysterious language, and presented the horoscopes of several personages;—in fact, it was evidently a manual of astrology, and had been recently studied with attention. Opposite to the windows depended from the wall a mirror of Venetian manufacture in an ebony frame, also curiously sculptured, and beneath it hung a large enamelled watch with four dials.

The Queen was dressed in the black robes always worn by widows, and which, as if in contempt of all the grandeur which surrounded her, she had retained from the time of her husband's death. Her hair was concealed beneath the angular white cap of the period, and a grey gauze veil, partly shaded her features, which were harsh and strongly marked, with but little appearance of former beauty. Her eyebrows were powerful and dark, and the

shadows round her eyes so deep, that, large as the eyes were, they gave additional size and rendered them still more brilliant, although no aid seemed necessary to increase the lustre, which, when animated, they emitted. The whites of these peculiar orbs were very visible, in which they appeared to float, giving an expression of restless severity to her countenance. Her nose was slightly bent, and her wide and expressive mouth displayed teeth, large, even, and well set, contrasting by their whiteness the sallow complexion of her face. Her figure was tall and large, her movements full of grace and majesty, and an air of command was visible in her slightest gesture. Where her design was to persuade, her voice could be soft and musical, but its ordinary tone was deep, hoarse, and startling.

She had been poring over the cabalistic characters of her astrological book for some time, but her eyes were now frequently turned from her study to the door of her chamber, or rather, to a panel, covered with tapestry, which fitted into the wall, and opened by a secret spring, known only to herself. Her foot beat restlessly against the floor, as she turned over the mysterious leaves, as though she was impatient at the difficulty of comprehending some passage: at length, she rose, and approaching one of the narrow windows, in a pane of which was emblazoned the arms of France, on a shield, she looked out upon the moonlight scene beneath. Slumbering Paris lay stretched before her: the crowded roofs and lofty spires of the great capital were all touched by the silver light, and the dark gulfs between the streets seemed like intersecting lines in the clear map. Over the tower rested a mass of dark clouds, which seemed to threaten a storm, but all besides was bright and calm.

"Sleeping,—silent,"—she murmured—"I, perhaps, of all this busy, stirring world of human beings, may be the only living thing awake, and watching—for what! to study how to obtain that, for which my false stars told me I was born. I was promised power, and I will be mistress of it,—it is the aim, the end of my existence. I have struggled, battled,—sinned for it,—one crime, more or less, can be of little moment—if it be indeed a crime

to injure the enemies of religion!" She paused, and turned her glance towards the crucifix, as if she expected some demonstration of Heaven's approval, then continued her soliloquy. "Must I always have foes to contend with, who strive to baffle all my projects?—yet I have hitherto triumphed over them all. Of what avail was my imprisonment, and all the persecution I endured in infancy, when it became at last a question, whether the child, predicted to be a firebrand, should be cast upon the pikes of besieging soldiery,—my star prevailed, and the deserted, cloistered outcast, became Queen of France: yet, even then, an adverse influence pursued me, and my spirit was forced for years to bow before the widow of de Brézé—nay, I owed the very maintenance of my state to her,—and submitted to the thraldom!—her genius overmastered mine;—but I had youth,—she would have waned; but then he died—he died,—and how?" She clenched her teeth, and pressed her hands tightly together, as she exclaimed, "de Lorges!—the only man I ever loved—by whom I was contemned! Henry fell by his hand, and even yet I am unavenged. Diana felt my power at last, but he has yet to know how bitter is my hatred and how resolute my vengeance. My sons all thwarted me,—I should have been a sovereign,—and a baby contrived to rule through others. The race of Lorraine crushed me. Henry should have succeeded, and not this sickly Charles; but he will die, like his brother; disease is already wasting him, and to end his sufferings might be mercy. The Bourbon's pride must be checked in time, and the Guises awed, if possible, or secured. Yet," she added, stopping suddenly before the book she had been reading, "yet the star of Navarre rises in spite of every thing. I cannot comprehend this contradiction—would that René were come—what can detain him?" She resumed her place at the window, then paced the chamber again, her steps heavy and slow, and her figure bowed as if by the weight of her thought. A low sound was heard without, which startled her, and she approached the tapestried panel, and listened; the sound was repeated, and she placed her hand on the spring; another moment, and Bianco had entered from the opening.

"I expected you," said Catherine, with a deep-drawn breath.

"Yes, Madonna," answered the favourite, "there is reason that you should. I have news of import."

"Speak," said Catherine, eagerly. "I am prepared."

"Be prepared," said René, speaking with the familiarity which, when alone, he was accustomed to use with his royal mistress, "to act with decision. The cow of Navarre has been warned—emissaries go about the streets with prophecies, ready made, to influence and alarm her followers: see here, a packet of papers which I have found with one of her people!

"Ha!" exclaimed Catherine, pressing her blanched lips together, as she hastily perused the pamphlets which René spread before her. "The Huguenots are prophets too! so be it. What the stars decree shall be accomplished." She paused a moment, then hastily approached the Italian, and said solemnly, "René, do you remember the oath you took on that day when Anthony of Navarre denounced you as a murderer, and a word of mine saved you?"

Bianco met her piercing glance, unmoved. "Madonna," he said, "what need of this? I remember that oath for a twofold reason: first, I had had my revenge; and secondly, by your means, I escaped the penalty; and my gratitude induced me to swear to serve you. Have you since had reason to doubt me, or do you now?"

"No," said the Queen, "I believe you are true. Now give me proof. I require of you a service of some danger." She hesitated, when the Italian, drawing nearer to her, whispered in a tone which, though scarcely audible, made her start.

"You mean," he continued, fixing his snake-like eyes upon hers, "that Jeanne should die, and that I should find the means. The means are always in my power. I have, within myself, a spell which can draw the spirits of others towards me when I will it. Nay, I have divined your secret thoughts; for there is sympathy between us. Yet are there influences which can render abortive the result of a life of study,—we must wait for the hour.

Know, Madonna, that to me human life is of no more value than is the skin of the snake which he has cast, than is the shell of the worm which he has quitted. Blood is to me the same as water, though I prefer avoiding it, for it tells tales. I have a surer method, which, when I use it, never can fail."

As he spoke, rapidly and earnestly the mind of Catherine seemed to undergo a fearful struggle. She looked into his face as if fascinated by his intense gaze: her eyes were dilated, her lips white, and her hands hung powerless by her side: he finished speaking, and removed from her the glance which rooted her to the spot. She shuddered — passed her hands across her eyes, and sank into a chair; while Bianco, taking a roll of parchment from his bosom, began to read it with attention.

"René," said the Queen, after she had a little recovered her self-possession, "have you discovered if Montgomery is in Paris?"

"I have," answered he, looking up. "I know his haunts, and have intercepted a letter which he wrote to Queen Jeanne, appointing an interview with her, at the masqued ball, at the Tuileries. I let the information reach its destination, for my own reasons."

"What!" said Catherine, exultingly. "In Paris, in my own power! What reward would be too great for him who accomplishes my revenge? René," she continued, taking a sparkling ring from her finger, "wear this, to remind you of what is to be done."

"Thanks, Madonna," said the Italian, "your interest is mine."

"And now tell me," whispered Catherine, "does the great work prosper, or must I still linger in uncertainty? Is the talisman completed?"

"It advances rapidly," replied her confidant. "The planet Venus rises steadily towards the highest point of the heavens, and will soon fix over the head of her who is all powerful; but something still is wanting; we have had both blood and gold, but not enough."

"More gold you shall have," gasped Catherine.

"And why not more blood?" rejoined René, with a

sinister look. "There must be blood of infidels; the spirits must be propitiated."

"They shall," returned the Queen fiercely, "though whole oceans should be shed to gain them to my purpose."

"Madonna," said the adept, solemnly, "the time is coming when I can reveal to you what never yet has been told to mortal ears. Look," he added, pointing to the scroll he held, "behold this conjunction, and judge if we can fail. But to make assurance surer, cast your eyes on yonder mirror: it has before represented much that you have desired to know."

As he spoke, the lights in the candelabrum suddenly disappeared, and the chamber was in utter darkness. except from a small flame which flitted over the surface of the glass opposite, and disclosed confused groups of armed men, some carrying torches, some naked swords—beneath their feet they appeared to be treading their foes, and smiting them with their weapons—the assailants bore on their shoulders a white cross, and their hands were covered with blood. Catherine gazed with straining eyes and outstretched arms on the vision, which faded slowly away, and slowly and faintly the lights reappeared around the crucifix—but at that moment a bright flash was seen, and a tremendous burst of thunder echoed through the heavens, repeated gleams of blue lightning illumed the sky, and returning peals shook the tower to its foundation. Catherine stood transfixed with horror, but Bianco advanced unmoved to the window. A singular spectacle met his eye: the lightning was playing round the pane on which the shield of France was emblazoned with the arms of Valois; one moment it was irradiated with brilliancy, and in the next every vestige of the arms had disappeared, leaving the shield an entire blank. Bianco turned away, and saw that the eyes of Catherine had followed his, and that she had beheld the phenomenon.

As suddenly as it had burst, the storm passed away, and in a few moments the heavens were clear, and the moonlight glittered as before on the roofs and spires of Paris. Without attempting to explain away the omen, without another word, the mysterious pair, with a sign to

each other, quitted the apartment by the secret panel, and both sought their respective chambers, there to meditate, and plot, and devise new plans to counteract the influences which seemed warring against them.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WORD!

"Elle avoit à vaincre en ce funeste jour
Sa jeunesse, son cœur, un héros et l'amour."—VOLTAIRE.

EVERY gallery of the new palace of the Tuileries blazed with light; the gilded and painted compartments of the ceilings sent back a glow of rainbow richness; the marble halls, gorgeous with sculpture, exhibited treasures of art gathered from Italy by the hand of taste,—vases, busts, cabinets of curious workmanship, flowers, garlands, groves of aromatic plants, all combined in a crowd of splendour to dazzle the beholder, and make a scene of enchantment of the palace of which the Queen-mother had been the architect, if the modesty of Philibert de l'Orme had not done him injustice when he named it her entire work. Every portion of the splendidly decorated suite of apartments was filled to overflowing with fantastically dressed groups, wearing costumes of all nations, and of every variety that fancy could suggest. Among the most distinguished was the train of the Princess Marguerite, who appeared as nymphs, dryads, fauns, and sylvans, attendant on their Cynthia, and who executed dances of the most refined grace, to the admiration of all. Every name known to history or recorded in romance gave lustre to the scene; all of real or fanciful grandeur that could be collected thronged the gay place: chiefs of parties who had long contended through years of strife and anarchy here met in cheerfulness and abandonment. The illustrious leaders of the parties of Valois, Bourbon, Lorraine, and Guise, were mixed together in the dance, and paraded arm-in-arm along the glittering saloons: each seemed anxious to do

honour to this re-union of interests, this oblivion of all animosities. Young Henry of Navarre enjoyed the moment with all the frank reliance of an innocent heart; his gentle sister cast off her timidity, and shared with him in the delights and glories round them. The pensive cheek of Queen Jeanne was flushed with a glow of pleasure as she observed their satisfaction, and hope once more sprang in her heart as she saw her son lead forward the beautiful, and now smiling bride elect, with whom he performed a dance, then much in vogue, called La Pavanne d'Espagne, in whose slow and graceful movements the Princess had the reputation of excelling all the ladies of the court, and in which Henry appeared to much advantage, while the fascinations of his partner were displayed to the utmost. It was true that the soft expression of Marguerite's features as she looked on her partner, was caused by the evident admiration she excited, and by no feeling beyond that of gratified vanity: but it sufficed for the time, that the cold frown which she had worn since her appearance at court had passed away, and her part in the pageant was acted to perfection. The Queen-mother's brow was also unclouded; and nothing could exceed the charm with which she welcomed her guests, and excited and joined in the gaiety of the hour.

The Princess afterwards stepped with her brother of Anjou a *pazzameno d'Italie*, for which both were celebrated; and after a period, when the principal ballets and grand dances were concluded, all ceremony appeared at an end, and every one assumed a mask; while many, anxious to increase their enjoyment by introducing mystery, retired to alter their costume, and to carry on a series of amusing deceptions, which constitute the life of this sort of entertainment. By degrees, scarcely one of the original characters were to be recognised, and numerous were the jests and gay the sallies heard in every part of the spacious halls. The gardens were equally or more attractive; and there, in bowers of fragrance, were met groups and pairs earnest in their pursuit of amusement, and eager to enjoy the transient glories of their butterfly existence.

Among so many it was not difficult to escape notice,

and there were not wanting meetings of more importance than the scene seemed to imply, and conferences more serious than the trappings of pleasure round would appear to cover. In a part of the gardens where the shade was the deepest, were two figures in close conversation. The one, apparently a female, was seated, covered with a long dark veil, which concealed her features; beside her stood a knight in black armour, who wore on his shield, of the same colour, the motto, without device, "*No ay figura por mi dolor.*"

"Madam," said the mysterious figure, "be warned while there is yet time. I have ventured into the very den of the dragon, in the hope of saving you and yours. There is no truth in your enemies; there is no trust in Queen Catherine; she has laid a scheme to entrap us all. Leave Paris before it is too late; assemble your people, and begone."

"But, my dear anxious friend,—friend as I know you to be to my lost husband and his children," answered the female, "how can I recede now? Is not the hand of Marguerite almost in Henry's possession? My honour is engaged; my word is given."

"Madam," said the mask, "your word was pledged to Anthony of Navarre never to trust this woman. She has betrayed all who relied on her. For a crime which she knows to have been involuntary, has she not persecuted me to the verge of destruction?—did she not destroy my wife and child?—Oh God! even at this distance of time the thought unnerves me! I warn you to beware—to fly if possible, and all may yet be well."

"Montgomery," said Queen Jeanne, whom the reader must already have recognised, "I fear it is too late. Go to Henry; strive to impress him with the danger of the moment; and then I entreat you to leave this place, fraught with danger to you."

Their conference was here hastily put an end to by the appearance of a gay party, who were approaching the shaded alley where they were concealed, and separating instantly, they left the way clear to a group, whose disguises were sufficiently slight to allow the quick eye of

gallantry or affection to discover the object sought. The beautiful Marie de Cleves was led into the bower which the Queen of Navarre had just quitted, by a cavalier in the dress of an astrologer, whose undisguised voice told her that her admirer, the Duke of Anjou, was addressing words of meaning, but little mysterious, to her ear. The Princess Marguerite followed, and as quickly divined that the gay troubadour, who was entertaining her with a thousand compliments and tender complaints, was no other than the Duke de Guise, who had, it was known, long worn her chains.

"Oh, good astrologer," said the minstrel in a piteous accent, "exert your art, and let your predictions soften the heart of the most cruel beauty who ever caused the misery of a son of song."

"How is this, lady?" said the astrologer, taking the hand of the Princess: "the lines of this palm tell a different tale; there is no cruelty, no harshness here. Be satisfied, gentle minstrel; she is to be won by song, and the *don d'amoureux merci* will not be long withheld from him whose voice can second his heart."

Marguerite laughed, and turning to the troubadour, promised him her hand in the next dance as an earnest of her mercy.

"But come," said she, "you must tell this fair shepherdess her destiny, O learned sage; methinks there are few who can so well read her heart."

"This lady," said the Duke d'Anjou, taking the small shrinking hand of Marie in his own, "is not destined to be the bride of him who seeks her; her star is higher — it burns brighter. There is another heart more worthy of her; and a crown is hovering over her brow, which fate compels her to wear. Oh!" he whispered, "beloved Marie, wilt thou reject it? wilt thou — canst thou play with my true affection?"

"Alas!" answered the trembling and innocent Marie, "what shall I say, my lord? they force me to this marriage. I have no choice. My heart is very sad, nor have I skill to conceal its weakness."

"Adored Marie!" returned the Prince aloud, for he

perceived that they were now alone, "conceal nothing from me; my frankness equals your own. I know no form, no ceremony; I have no fitting words in which to tell how much — how tenderly I love you: all I can say is, that my heart and soul are yours, and that I will never resign you to another while I have life."

Terrified at his vehemence, though secretly delighted at an avowal to which her heart responded, the blushing girl sank upon a seat, unable to repress her tears, when both were startled by a voice near them, which uttered in a hollow tone one word which thrilled through the hearts of both; that word was "Death!"

The Princess uttered a shriek of horror, and fell fainting into the arms of Anjou; who, superstitious and credulous, like most of his race, and of the age in which he lived, hurried with tottering steps from the spot, bearing his lovely burthen with difficulty away. Having given her in charge to her female friends, he hastened to conceal his trepidation, and to remove his alarm, by joining the most boisterous parties he could find. But the fearful word rang in his ears, and at every pause in the music and every cessation of laughter the knell seemed still audible to him. Nor was he the only one by whom that terrible monosyllable had been heard: the gay troubadour while whispering soft tales in the gratified ear of the beautiful and vain bride elect, had suddenly been stopped in his lay by the sound, and though Marguerite heard it not, the paleness of his face and the change in his demeanour sufficed to spoil the pleasure of the hour, and she soon quitted her altered lover for one whom the awful summons had not reached.

Henry of Navarre heard it as he sat amidst a group of young beauties, all of whom were striving, not in vain, to attract his notice and admiration: but he heeded it only for a moment, when he felt a shudder pass over him, which he shook off with difficulty, and then resumed the light conversation in which he was engaged. It came to Queen Jeanne, as she quitted the dark alley where she had parted with Montgomery; and the black knight heard it as he strove to win his way to the son of Anthony.

While Henry was addressing some passing remark of a lively nature to the Admiral de Coligni, the latter heard the sound of that word close to his ear, and turned to see who spoke; but there was no one near: and the attention of all was attracted instantly by the figure of a jester, who came dancing up to them, and with quaint gestures addressed each in turn with some joke, which elicited peals of laughter. At length he approached young Henry and the Prince of Condé, who stood in a group of their friends.

"Adieu, gossip!" said the antic figure, "I am going a journey to Navarre. Can I take your commands?"

"How," answered Henry; "you show little wisdom to quit such a gay capital as this."

"You want me to stay to your wedding," returned the jester; "but methinks there are fools enough here already."

"But why do you leave us, is the question?"

"Because," said he in a whisper, "we are too much caressed here. They pamper and feed us, while we crouch to them: the beating will come next. Farewell! I like black bread and liberty better than a gilded rod."

"Nay, stay with us, and show the wisdom of being content," said Condé.

"No, no," replied the jester, "I would rather save my life with fools, than lose it with those who are too wise. — Ah, gossip," he continued mysteriously, "we shall all be obliged to whistle the psalms soon, they have already given orders that none of us shall sing them." He approached young Henry, and putting his mouth close to his ear, uttered, "Beware! — be on your guard, there is treachery on foot!"

Henry turned with an uneasy expression on his countenance. — "This is strange," said he to Condé; "three times to-night I have been warned, — and my mother's face looks sad and anxious. Let us join her and my sister, and try to banish the care that seems to weigh upon her."

They accordingly made their way to a spot where the Queen, who had laid aside her disguise, was seated with

her daughter; beside them stood René Bianco, who was at that moment handing to Jeanne a fine conserved peach, which he delivered from his mistress, and which the Queen of Navarre, praising its beautiful appearance, ate with much refreshment, for she complained of the heat of the rooms. Her son led her into the air; but her indisposition continuing to increase, she shortly after retired with her daughter to her own hotel, and the gay entertainment was soon at an end, having exhibited more than usual splendour and been carried on with more than usual hilarity and enjoyment.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INTERVIEW.

"I know not how it is my heart stands back
And meets not this man's love."—JOANNA BAILLIE.

THE day on which Claude Emars entered on his new employment of secretary to the President Bailly, the Queen of Navarre was reported to be indisposed, and on the fourth day from the commencement of her illness that estimable princess was no more.

Consternation and grief took possession of the minds of the Protestant party. The agony of young Henry was extreme; and from the moment when he held in his arms the inanimate body of his beloved mother a settled gloom seemed to have taken the place of the buoyancy and cheerfulness which had hitherto distinguished him. The Queen's fever had come on rapidly on the morning after she had quitted the masked ball at the Tuileries; she was entirely unconscious of the presence of those dearest to her, and continued to call constantly for her son, who was kneeling in despair at her side. Words of frightful import broke from her tongue, — she raved of treachery discovered, of plots, of murder; and the name of Catherine de Medicis was uttered by her with execration.

"Where is my Henry?" exclaimed the unfortunate

patient,—"they have destroyed him!—no marriage—it is all a cheat, a scheme to ruin us all. Let us back to Navarre; there he may yet be safe. Ha! here is blood! Catherine — fiend! — it is my child's — my people's; but no, no — even yet he will triumph — your sons shall not reign — they shall fall one by one beneath the vengeance of outraged heaven!"

These, and other incoherent speeches, struck terror into the minds of her attendants, and confirmed in Henry awakened suspicion: as he listened to his mother's dying exclamations, and as he gazed in speechless grief on her pallid and livid form, strange doubts and horrid fears pressed on his brain. He quitted the beloved remains and his soul sickened at his coming nuptials, which this sad event had only delayed for a short time; he saw they were inevitable, and he saw too late that the toils were too closely wound round him to escape them.

Claude, on the loss of his benefactress, was overwhelmed with such deep grief that he secluded himself from all companionship but tears. The President, owing to the injuries he had received on the night when he was rescued by Claude, had not required his services, and some time had elapsed before the master and his new secretary met. When they did so, the depression of Claude's spirits prevented his alluding to the circumstances under which he had before seen him; but, had he even felt inclined to do so, the cold and almost forbidding manner of Bailly would have checked him at once.

The President was a man whose fine features bore the impress of high birth. His eyes were dark and bright, his hair slightly touched with grey, and his height and air commanding and dignified. There was nothing in his face or figure which could be objected to, but there was a chilling severity in his manner which forbade familiarity or confidence, and, except when conversing with his daughter, a smile never lighted up his features for a moment. That daughter Claude had not yet seen, and he began to fear that he should never have an opportunity of convincing himself of the reality of Bianco's glowing picture. Perhaps the melancholy state of his mind,

leading him to pensive reflection, caused his thoughts to dwell the more on the vague and shadowy form revealed to him for so short a time under circumstances so agitating; though his prudence told him it was a weakness, yet he could not control the imagination which brought before him the small fair hands, the bending figure, the long unbound hair, and he again heard the silver, sobbing tones of that peculiarly sweet voice which he felt sure he should recognise at any distance of time.

He was one day occupied with these musings, and mechanically going through the duties of his office, when Bailly rather abruptly entered the apartment, and in a hurried manner delivering to him some keys, informed him, that being hastily summoned to attend the King on business of importance he required his assistance, and desired him to follow to the palace in an hour with papers, which would be found in a cabinet in the apartments of his daughter, to whom he was to take the keys and receive them from her hands; he departed in haste, leaving Claude in some agitation. "The moment," he thought, "is now come, and an opportunity offers for putting an end to my suspense, and ascertaining whether the memory of the daughter is as treacherous as that of the father appears to be." Almost unconsciously he proceeded to execute his commission, but when he reached the door leading to the suite of rooms occupied by Mademoiselle Alix he paused, and his heart beat violently. It appeared to him that the fate of his future life hung on that moment, that the simple opening of that door would decide it, and he hesitated to unclose the mysterious veil of his hidden destiny; he strove to calm his increasing emotion, and advanced, when again his step was arrested by the sound of a lute, accompanied by one of the softest voices he had ever heard, but which seemed familiar to his ear as though he had heard it from his infancy. The words of the song were those of a poem written by one of the numerous imitators of the great and favourite poet of the day, and the air breathed the very soul of sadness. The lines were supposed to be addressed by the bard to the lovely Mary Stuart on her departure from France.

" Gone is the sun — and beauty fled !
Thou flower, that blossom'd in its ray,
Where shalt thou turn thy languid head,
And, sighing, look for parted day ?
Ah ! wither where thy gaze begun —
Thy hour is past — gone is the sun !

" Ye crimson bells, upon whose leaves
Are stampt the words that speak of woe ;
Whose urn the falling dew receives
That bids each cup with grief o'erflow ;
Ye buds, that happy lovers shun,
Form ye my wreath — gone is the sun ! "

The song ceased, yet he lingered at the threshold ; the notes still vibrated on his ear, and he feared to break the spell which their sweetness flung round his heart.

The President's daughter stood near a window ; her back was towards him as he entered, and, as she hung over her lute in a bending attitude, her long dark hair falling over her face and neck, Claude was forcibly struck with the similarity of her present appearance to that on the evening when he had so imperfectly seen her. She turned suddenly on hearing his step, and started, with a slight exclamation, while her brow became flushed with crimson. " Surely," she said, in a faltering voice, " I was not deceived ; you come to ——." She hesitated, and Claude, whose confusion equalled her own, so much was he impressed with the extreme loveliness he beheld, as he looked in admiration on the soft features and brilliant eyes which were turned towards him, hastened to say —

" I come, madam, from your father."

" He is then convinced," interrupted she, " that Signor Bianco has falsely informed us, and that it is not to him we owe so deep an obligation ? "

" Pardon me ! " said Claude, blushing with emotion,— " my business from the President merely relates to some papers which he desired me, his secretary, to request you to deliver."

Alix looked more embarrassed than before ; and, taking the keys from Claude, left the room in order to execute her father's commands, without adding a word.

When he found himself alone, Claude, recovering from his confusion, reproached himself for the coldness of his answer to her animated question. " Why should I hesitate," considered he, " to ask her meaning, or to

avow myself her protector on that night of danger? René surely did but jest! — he dare not really pretend to her. How very fair she is! — what soft dark eyes! — how unlike her father's!"

He was still musing thus when Alix returned, and presenting to him the packet, with a slight inclination, but keeping her eyes on the ground, was retiring, when Claude, resolving to conquer his ill-timed timidity, ventured to speak.

"May I be pardoned, madam," said he, "if I request to know the reason of the question which you but now did me the honour of addressing to me?"

Alix replied rather coldly, — "It arose from error. — I thought I had recognised in you a friend to whom my father was indebted for services which — but I was wrong, and ——"

"If the slight assistance I was so fortunate as to render he President on the night of a recent fête in the gardens of the Queen's palace is that to which you allude, madam," said Claude, restored to confidence by her almost haughty manner, "I am much favoured by its retaining a place in your memory."

Alix cast on him the same look of grateful surprise which her countenance had worn on his first entrance. "There is some extraordinary mystery in this!" she exclaimed; "pray inform me by what chance Signor René became our conductor home? I have reasons for the inquiry."

Claude hastened to relate all the circumstances of the accident, his meeting with René, and subsequent separation from the party by the pressure of the crowd.

"It is very strange," said Alix; "Bianco assured us it was he who was our deliverer from that peril. I know not how to atone for our apparent ingratitude to you!"

"Oh, madam!" exclaimed Claude, "I blush to have recalled to your memory a circumstance so little worthy of such attention as you bestow on it. It was my fear of having offended by the boldness of my question, which caused me to do so."

Alix reiterated her thanks, and Claude took his leave

with a throbbing heart. He was hurrying along the gallery, half afraid of having overstaid his hour, for it appeared to him as if a whole life had been crowded into that short space of time, and that the confidence which had grown out of the mystery explained, had thrown down at once the barrier of ceremony which made the President's beautiful daughter and himself strangers, — when he was accosted by Madame Mabille. After an affectionate greeting she inquired whither he was hastening with such anxiety.

"I go, good dame Mabille," said he, "to the palace, and bear these papers to the President."

"Ay," answered she, "he is closeted with the Queen-mother; I met him as I came from the Louvre with René Bianco, the Queen's perfumer. Dear Claude, he seeks you much of late, — let me caution you against him: there are strange rumours concerning his essences and pomanders. Beware of him!" she added in a low voice, pressing her finger on her lip. — "Believe me, all we of Navarre have reason to fear the favourite of the Queen."

"Kind Mabille," answered Claude, "I thank you for your caution, although it is unnecessary, for almost without being able to assign a good reason, I like not Bianco. It has often surprised me to observe his ascendency at court, and that those bow to him before whom others tremble."

"He possesses," said Mabille, "talents of no mean order; and, at court, the power of amusing and of being useful are prized, not honesty and principle. He is skilled in music, — which has a spell with these Italians, — and, above all, he is said to be an able chemist, and an adept in the properties of dangerous drugs and minerals. What, tell me, has a perfumer to do with these secrets? Accept nothing from him, his gifts are fatal, — and so are Catherine's, for they are prepared by him. Had our beloved Queen been warned in time she had never worn those perfumed gloves, which pleased her eye so much by their fatal embroidery, nor those nosegays which René has brought so much into fashion of late. Alas! they were sent her by her deadliest foe!"

"Surely, Mabille!" exclaimed Claude, turning pale, "you cannot suspect ——"

"No;" said Mabille impressively, "I am but too certain. But go, my dear child; Heaven guards the unwary."

As she spoke she released his arm, which she had held to detain him, and with much perturbation in her step withdrew.

Mabille had from her very early years been attached to the daughter of the President; for having felt great affection for her mother, who died when she was quite a child, all her regard was transferred to Alix, whom she had seen born. The Queen-mother, on the birth of her son Charles, had availed herself of Mabille's skill and management: and as the Queen of Navarre had strongly recommended her countrywoman, and the young Prince's weak constitution required constant care, Catherine overlooked the circumstance of her being a Protestant, and was besides not sorry to entrust her child to one in whose integrity she could rely more fully than on the intriguing menials who surrounded her. Beyond this, however, she had never liked Mabille, and would long since have got rid of her but that the attachment of Charles to his nurse had become a passion, and he exhibited for her an affection of which his sullen and wayward nature hardly appeared susceptible.

There was a tie between the mother of Alix and Mabille which had drawn them closely together; this was the powerful one of religion, and the nurse was made a confidant of a secret which the wife of the bigoted President carefully concealed from him. Alix had been instructed, however, in the faith which her mother had adopted; and on her premature death, to Mabille had been consigned the task of supporting her in it under the trials which she had to undergo, as her courage had not yet been equal to the undertaking of communicating to Bailly what would be so distasteful to him.

As Claude resumed his way to the palace, the nurse proceeded to the apartments of Alix. As she opened the door of her chamber, she observed her weeping. "My child," said the kind-hearted woman, "what distresses you? what mean these tears?"

"Good mother," replied Alix, embracing her, "I rejoice that you are arrived. Bianco has deceived us, as I told you I suspected, and it is to my father's new secretary that we were indebted for our rescue."

"To Claude Emars?" exclaimed Mabille.

"I know not his name," answered Alix. "But he has just been here on business for my father, and from him I have discovered the truth." She then recounted the facts which she had learnt from Claude.

"Alix," said Mabille, when she had concluded, "Renê is of low birth and mean calling, but he is the favourite, the counsellor, the constant companion of Queen Catherine; the nobles pay him homage, the King himself endures his familiarities. He expects to be regarded by every one as an equal, and his insolence is not only licensed, but encouraged by his mistress. Alas! he is a dangerous and evil character, and while he cannot be trusted, must not be offended.

"Mabille," faltered Alix, turning pale as she spoke, "I have a strange thought which torments me; and yet it is so absurdly improbable, that I shame to mention it. It has struck me that this man presumes to aspire to my regard, and, what is worse, that my father does not frown on his pretensions. Your experience can better judge; tell me, dear Mabille, do you think it—yes, you do, you must think it impossible?

"Alix," said Mabille, solemnly, "I fear it is too true."

"Oh!" cried the terrified girl, as she heard the confirmation of her fears, "say not so; my father would never sacrifice his only child to such a being as this Bianco; the mere sight of whom inspires me with feelings of dread and disgust, such as I never before experienced."

"And with reason," returned the nurse. "Listen, Alix, to my surmise, and judge if I can enter into your repugnance to this man. When first I knew your dear mother, I was a happy wife; my husband followed the calling of a goldsmith, and possessed his art in a manner almost unrivalled. His workmanship was looked upon as superior to that of most artists of the day, and his business was flourishing. He was, as you know, a Lutheran like

myself; but though at that time the laws were very severe against us, he was so much respected and upheld by the nobles, that we had little reason to complain of injustice. There was a man in the same profession as my husband, who was also a good workman, but of an envious and malicious disposition. He was called Russanges, a name which became afterwards sufficiently notorious, but at the time of which I speak, he lived quietly enough in Paris. His talents might have caused him to be distinguished, but his habits of dissipation and idleness kept him always poor. One of his companions was an Italian, known as Florio, who had a peculiar genius for music, and played with exquisite taste on the guitar. This man, whose character was much suspected, had a son, whom he had apprenticed to Russanges to learn his trade, having obtained assistance from the Queen-mother, to whose presence he was occasionally admitted, as she delighted to hear his songs, and always favoured her countrymen. A murder and robbery was, however, committed in Paris, and suspicion was strong upon the Italian. He escaped,— as it was thought, favoured by the court party,— and left his son with our neighbour the goldsmith, who soon began to grow tired of his charge, and his embarrassments increasing, he treated the boy very harshly and cruelly, so that my husband, who had a kind and generous heart, could not bear to see him thus ill-used, and proposed to relieve Russanges of his burthen, and make him useful in his own house. To this the other agreed, and young Florio was transferred to us. He was then about fourteen, and a handsome, clever lad, but as idle as his late master, and with all the bad propensities, as well as the talents, of his father. He lived with us some time, and we hoped to be able to teach him respectable habits, as well as his business, but in vain; and though, before, he was always complaining of the cruelty of his former master, yet now he was continually visiting him, and consorting with the bad characters who were there in the habit of congregating. We soon found that the object of these meetings was to discover and denounce the Protestants as conspirators and rebels; and, in fine, the ungrateful boy

whom we had protected, having been one day reprimanded for ill conduct, hastened to his associates, and through his means we were denounced as heretics and traitors. A band of robbers, with the sanction of justice, attacked our house and pillaged it, and it was with difficulty that I escaped to throw myself at the feet of the Queen-mother, and obtain a promise of protection. As I had been recommended to her as nurse by the Queen of Navarre, she listened to my complaints, and my husband was released from custody, and part of his goods restored; but neither Florio nor any of his comrades were even reprimanded. In an attempt that was made shortly after on the life of the Count de Montgomery, this boy was discovered to be one of the assassins; but again he was permitted to escape, though my husband, who was on the spot when the crime was attempted, identified the young ruffian. After that he was lost sight of. In the meantime the death of the King occurred, and I had the affliction to lose my beloved husband, who disappeared in a mysterious manner, and was never heard of after he set out on a journey of importance, having a secret end in view, which he was to conceal by carrying merchandise with him. Alas! there is a sad tale connected with his loss, which it were useless for me to recount. Years passed away, and amongst the numerous favourites who have by turns ruled the Queen-mother by their arts, none succeeded so entirely in gaining her regard as René Bianco, who, being her countryman, had free access to her, and coming recommended by some powerful friends, was soon taken into her confidence. I was long before I saw him, for he seemed to avoid being in my vicinity; but when I did, though more than twenty years had passed, I recognised in him—I feel sure I could not be deceived—no other than Florio."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Alix. "And this is the man my father receives into his counsels, and whom I am expected to notice favourably. Does he know you, dear nurse; or, rather, is he aware that you know him?"

"I have been careful to appear unconscious of his identity," replied Mabille, "as I fear him much. I have already hinted to the King my suspicions of his unworthi-

ness; and I endeavour to prevent, as much as possible, his approaching Charles, for I suspect every one who is in the confidence of the Queen-mother, whose projects are inscrutable."

"This is fearful!" said Alix. "We live on the brink of a precipice, threatened with destruction every hour."

"Be prepared, dear Alix," said the nurse, "for the worst. I feel certain that a crisis is at hand; but trust, my child, in Heaven's mercy. We must not murmur, but submit, and look through the darkness for the light which will shine at last."

As Mabille spoke, her eyes were cast upwards with pious earnestness, a sorrowful yet resigned expression sat on her faded countenance, — it seemed as if a gleam of prophetic inspiration played round her. Alix threw herself into her arms, with a burst of emotion she could not suppress, and their tears were mingled together, when the sound of her father's step interrupted their farther conversation, and hastily drying her eyes, she prepared to meet him, and Mabille withdrew.

Claude meanwhile, on his way to the palace, observed that all the houses were being decorated for the approaching festivities. The cyphers of Marguerite and Henry were everywhere intertwined in garlands of flowers, while banners and drapery were displayed on every side. All wore an air of animation; every countenance was cheerful; and the acclamations of the people were loud as the young King of Navarre, mounted on a spirited charger, rode towards the palace, accompanied by the Admiral de Coligni. The open and manly countenance of Henry, notwithstanding that a benevolent smile greeted those around him, was clouded by sadness; and as he looked on the gay preparations, and the sparkling habiliments he wore, he seemed to be thinking that the mourning weeds for his beloved mother had been exchanged too soon. With a starting tear, which he could not conceal, Claude saluted the Prince as he passed, and his look of mournful and affectionate sympathy did not pass unnoticed by Henry, who, turning on him a glance full of kindness, waved his hand in token of recognition, and continued his way. His white plume soon dis-

appeared under the arch of the palace gate, and Claude was following, when across the court through which the princes had passed, he beheld Bianco coming hastily forward, at intervals turning his head, as if observing their motions. He seemed so much occupied, that he was close to Claude before he perceived him, and on his looking suddenly up, the latter was startled by the sinister expression of his scowling brow and the pallid hue of his cheek. His face, however, instantly brightened as he greeted Claude, and the cordial and apparently frank character which it assumed, formed a striking contrast with that of the moment before. The transition was not lost upon his observer, whose recent conversation with Mabille flashed upon his mind.

"You are looked for, Claude, by the President," said René.

"I have been unexpectedly detained," answered the secretary, "and hasten to redeem my negligence."

"You should apologise to me," said René, smiling, "if you knew how much interested I am in your delay."

They advanced together, and René, with an air of friendly confidence, resumed, "You remember our conversation of the other night? Well, my star is rising, I assure you: the Queen-mother has this day granted me a splendid pension, and has intimated to the President Bailly her wish that I should become his son-in-law. What think you of my fortune now?"

"You!" cried Claude, starting back; "can it be possible? But will Bailly — will his daughter consent?"

"Will they refuse," said Bianco with emphasis, his lip curling with an ironical expression, "when my Donna commands? No, no, I am sure of Bailly; and as for the pretty Alix, her consent is easily gained."

They proceeded in silence; a thousand uneasy thoughts agitating the bosom of Claude, and René being occupied with reveries of ambition, till, having reached the chamber where the President awaited his secretary, they separated.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROYAL MARRIAGE.

"How could she wed?—what could I do but wed?"
MATHURIN's *Bertram.*

THE two brides, whose marriage was to secure the happiness of their country, saw the morning dawn upon the day fixed with feelings differing, yet in some degree the same.

Perhaps, for the first time in her life, Marguerite de Valois was full of thought: now that the time had really arrived, its importance to herself and those connected with her seemed to flash upon her mind, and to banish the levity and careless indifference with which she had treated the subject. Love was, in her estimation, a matter of every-day occurrence: she heard of it, saw it wherever she moved; every man who approached her either felt or feigned it; and so accustomed was she to homage and devotion, that its absence alone attracted her attention: she considered it a part of her state,—of the real nature of true affection she was perfectly unconscious. She had more than once imagined herself in love, mistaking gratified vanity for a deeper emotion,—had felt pleasure in the presence of its object, and regret in absence,—but this was a pastime, and no more: she looked upon the existence of love, such as the records of romance portrayed it, as a poetical fiction, never intended to enter into the affairs of real life. Of late a change, sudden and startling, had come over her mind. Henry was to be her husband. She looked upon him as a person appointed for state reasons to be her companion for life; she saw in him an uneducated boy, with reputed courage, supposed goodness of heart, and recorded generous feelings, but with manners quite unfashioned, with taste uncultivated, and a coldness towards herself altogether imperturbable. He had nevertheless, in spite of his retiring quietness, bursts of enthusiasm at times, which astonished those about him, and momentary glimpses of eloquence which threw into shade the powers of polished courtiers who usually eclipsed him:

all this she witnessed only in his intercourse with others, — with her he was always studiously guarded and formal, his conversation in monosyllables, and his expressions merely common-place. It was impossible that he should interest her: and how should she live with one who seemed to build up between them a barrier of ice as impenetrable as that of his native mountains!

It was a serious thought, — a fearful undertaking! She had no escape from her fate; she must marry a man who was indifferent to her, and to him she was nothing more than a political appendage. It was, therefore, with bitter and chilled feelings that she suffered herself to be decked for this unpromising bridal, and she resolved to show her careless bridegroom that her inclination had nothing to do with the ceremony she was forced to go through.

The mind of Marie de Cleves was equally occupied with that of Marguerite, but every fresh springing thought was fraught with agony and unutterable despair. Young, inexperienced, innocent, and happy, she had never contemplated, even when she knew that her hand was promised, the misery which would attend the sacrifice. She was to marry, like her friend the Princess Marguerite, a man with whom she was scarcely acquainted: with the Prince of Condé she had scarcely ever exchanged a word, yet she would be expected to devote the remainder of her life to him, while she loved, adored, existed for another! The Duke of Anjou had at length told her all that she had hoped, sighed for, prayed to be convinced of — and the conviction of her happiness and wretchedness came together. A frightful gulf was opened before her; she could not fly from its brink; she was urged onwards though she saw it yawning beneath her feet.

To her, pure as she was, and unsuspicious of evil, the character of Henry of Anjou appeared little short of perfection: his exquisite refinement, his insinuating address, his wit, grace, and the air of absorbed devotion he could throw into his attentions, were sufficient to have won a heart more practised in the ways of the world; but when, in addition to the charm which attracted all, real feeling and passionate attachment came to his aid, how was it pos-

sible for the guileless and confiding girl of sixteen to resist the spell, and to give up her whole soul to the delicious certainty of loving and being beloved.

Her daily intercourse with Marguerite, who was tenderly attached to her, and found in her innocent enthusiasm, and total absence of suspicion, something to admire and delight in, favoured in no small degree the suit of the Duke, and gave him opportunities which he was not slow to take advantage of.

Although he could boast of no more morality than belonged to the profligate court in which he lived, yet, for the first time, on this occasion he was inspired with a real passion, almost, in its intensity and delicacy, worthy of her who had caused it — a passion which called into being all that was good in his character, while its evil, which, alas! preponderated, was lulled, for the time, entirely to rest. He had, like the beautiful girl whom he was leading into danger, been so occupied with his happiness that he had totally forgotten the positions in which they were mutually placed, and, contented with the bliss of the present moment, would not allow himself to look beyond, although he could not but be aware that the fabric of his delusive fancy might be annihilated in a moment.

The terrible hour had now come, and, like those who live close to a volcano, and know its fearful explosion must one day arrive and sweep their city to perdition, yet put off the evil anticipation, and revel on the brink of the crater, so Marie awoke to the horror of her fate, and was stunned with the extent of her misfortune.

The young King of Navarre, in the meantime, and the Prince of Condé, felt themselves victims bound to the stake without the means of escape. Death, or some violent struggle, was what they contemplated, and this double marriage seemed to them but another scene in the mysterious drama preparing: for the actors in it they cared little, and were far from imagining what conflicts reigned in the breasts of those who were victims like themselves.

Such were the sentiments of the four persons who prepared that morning to take the principal parts in the

great pageant at which all France was to look on. With these feelings they joined their respective parties, and the ceremonies of the royal bridal began.

The immense square of the Parvis-Notre-Dame was filled with eager spectators, scarcely kept back by the multitude of guards, whose lines extended along the whole way from the palace of the Louvre to the cathedral, and it seemed as if the whole population of Paris and its environs were poured forth into the streets through which the magnificent procession of the kings and queens concerned in the ceremony of this important marriage was to pass. From the roofs of the churches of St. Christophe, and of Ste. Geneviève des Ardens, of St. Jean le Rond, and St. Denis du Pas, myriads of eyes were gazing on the scene below; and all the numerous religious edifices besides, which then surrounded their great mother, allowed the people on that day to enjoy the advantage which their exalted position afforded. The sombre and severe character of these antique buildings was changed, as if by magic; their usually gloomy aspect gave place to an air of lightness and gaiety,—garlands, flags, streamers, scarfs, fluttered from every window and loophole, and the gorgeous and majestic pile of Notre-Dame itself assumed for the time a less solemn and awful appearance. The magnificent façade of this imposing edifice then, as ever, offered a spectacle worthy of the gaze of the admiring crowd. Its three irregular porticos, surcharged with statues and crowded with ornaments, rose proudly as if to welcome the guests who sought to enter those wondrous gates of wrought iron, whose marvellous delicacy and elaborate beauty it was currently believed could only have been produced by unearthly hands. The mysterious zodiac which ornamented the chief entrance was looked upon on this occasion as fraught with more than usual meaning, and there were some amongst the crowd who did not hesitate to affirm that the figure of the Holy Virgin, which the pious inventor had substituted for that of Ceres, bowed her head as the bridal train approached. However this might be, onward it came glittering with gold and gems, one mass of uninterrupted splendour. From their niches

along the whole extent of the face of the church, the twenty-seven statues of a race of kings seemed to look down with exultation, as a peal of artillery, loud, long, and solemn, announced the arrival of the royal visitants.

Above the principal portico, beneath the great rose window, the platform had been erected on which Henry of Navarre and his bride were to be exhibited to the people, and where the service was to be concluded. Within was nearly the same concourse of spectators as without, for surrounding the choir, the nave, and extending along the line of arches, the beautiful gallery supported by one hundred and eight slender columns was filled to overflowing by splendidly dressed persons anxious to witness the spectacle.

From the hundred painted windows and from the three gorgeous roses the light of a mid-day summer sun poured down a flood of radiance, touching with every hue of the rainbow the carved foliage of the marble pillars, and casting gleams of variegated colour on the chequered floor. In forty-five chapels round, the altars were decked with the most sumptuous ornaments, a multitude of lights burnt before every shrine, and relics of the most precious nature were exhibited to the eyes of the believer, amongst which a finger of St. John the Baptist and part of the head of St. Denis were not the least conspicuous. Huge, fierce, and menacing, leaning against a pillar of the nave, the gigantic figure of St. Christopher, twenty-eight feet in height, bent under the weight of the miraculous infant borne on his shoulders, and supported on the trunk of an enormous tree, appeared regarding with attention the train which swept past him; the equestrian statue of Philip de Valois seemed also instinct with life and about to urge his war-steed onwards, as he did when, after the battle of Cassel, the redoubtable warrior entering the church fully caparisoned, his visor closed, his sword in hand, rode up to the high altar, there to return thanks to the blessed Virgin for the victory he had gained.

The train of nobles, princes, and ladies slowly advanced to the high altar, where they were to hear mass. The Protestant part of the procession separated themselves from

the rest, and joined the King of Navarre and the Prince of Condé in the choir, where they waited till the Cardinal de Bourbon had gone through that sacred service and they were summoned to take their part in the marriage ceremony.

In a conspicuous situation in the gallery, reserved for the friends and intimates of those in power, sat the President Bailly and his beautiful daughter Alix, spectators of the pageant, and at no great distance from them, leaning against one of the delicate columns, stood the secretary Claude Emars. His gaze was not apparently attracted by the splendid scene around him, the glittering lights, the blaze of jewels, the gorgeous pageantry — neither did he seem to have ears for the solemn and entrancing melody, the bursts of harmonious fervour which echoed through the stupendous aisles, and lingered amidst the *forest* of beams which adorned the majestic roof, — there was but one object in all that glorious assemblage which had power to occupy his mind; and that was Alix. She was, like all around her, richly dressed, and her beauty, if possible, was more than usually remarkable; but Claude observed that her countenance wore no appearance of pleasure, and that from time to time she cast an alarmed, anxious glance around, as if her eyes feared to encounter some object they would willingly avoid. As he bent forward, almost unconsciously gazing upon her, he was suddenly recalled to recollection by the deep blush that overspread her brow as her glance met his, and she recognised the person who was so intently occupied in contemplating her features. Claude instantly cast down his eyes in equal confusion and an emotion which he feared another look would betray. He had not entirely recovered his presence of mind when his regards rested on the features of René Bianco: he saw him approach the spot where Alix sat, and with his accustomed ease and effrontery address the President and his daughter. With difficulty repressing an exclamation of vexation, he watched the movements of the party, and observed the looks of Alix when René spoke to her to be those of horror, so far did they exceed the expression of mere aversion. The cold

and unmoved countenance of Bailly preserved its usual character. René was himself all cheerfulness and exultation; his dress was peculiarly splendid, and set off to advantage his remarkably handsome figure, while the high white plume that waved over his dark brows relieved the olive tint of his complexion, and as he pointed out to his companions the approach of Queen Catherine, he seemed no unfitting favourite for such a personage.

The Queen-mother and her followers were, at the moment when all this was passing, proceeding, as has been said, towards the high altar. She leant on the arm of her favourite son Anjou, whose face was very pale, and his eye wandering with an expression of pain and uneasiness little suited to the occasion: he scarcely looked up, and carefully avoided turning his eyes towards the group of ladies, amongst whom was the interesting and unfortunate Marie de Cleves.

As they passed the gallery, she paused and beckoned to René, who was instantly at her side. She said a few words to him in a low voice, while her large bold eyes were fixed on Alix, who stood pale, and almost breathless, the object of her scrutiny. At length, after a significant smile bestowed on her favourite, she continued her way, while Alix sunk back on her seat pale as marble, and apparently as inanimate.

Attracted by the attention of the Queen-mother, the eyes of several of the courtiers were directed towards the object of her regard, and amongst others the Count de Coconnas, and the celebrated La Mole, who were following conspicuously in the train, and paused a moment at the same time as Catherine.

Count Boniface La Mole was one of the most remarkable persons of his time, renowned for the elegance of his person, and the éclat attached to all that belonged to him. His taste was the criterion of fashion; his approval stamped value on every new invention, and every extravagant fashion and habit. The poets, players, and men of letters of the day, sought his applause. The beauties who surrounded the politic and intriguing Catherine, dressed, looked, and spoke to please and captivate him. Even the

elegant, refined, and graceful Marguerite allowed his influence, and permitted her taste to be in a great degree regulated by his.

The epithet which he had acquired of Le Baladin de la Cour, had not raised him much in the estimation of sober-minded persons, and he was looked upon by the better part of the community as the very impersonation of profligacy and effeminacy.

This accomplished ornament of the most unprincipled court in Europe was now carelessly sauntering on in the train of the Queen-mother, carefully avoiding any indication of interest in the ceremonial which absorbed all attention, but looking from side to side with an air of profound indifference, occasionally lifting from his side, where it depended, a small mirror in a gold frame, which, though till lately an appendage of the female toilet, he had newly introduced as an ornament amongst the fops of the period. His attire bespoke the utmost care and consideration, and proclaimed the high importance attached to his character; the most faultless propriety reigned throughout, and the ensemble was so perfect and so inimitable that no one portion of the elaborate finish shone out more conspicuously than the rest. In his ears he wore rings of rubies, with drops of pearl; his hair was curled, turned back, and fastened with combs; the hat he negligently held was adorned with an aigrette of diamonds, and from the front hung over the forehead, when worn, a profusion of little ornaments in a fringe of various-coloured gems, which shook at every movement of the head. His beard was long and pointed,—a mode very dear to him, as he was conscious of the peculiarly fine growth of that imposing appendage,—in which particular, as some of the nobles could not vie with him, a few followed the example of Henry of Anjou, whose beard was worn short, and whose hair was dyed of whatever colour pleased him for the time. On his white uncovered hand sparkled numerous small rings, from which, as he occasionally waved his fringed handkerchief, or pointed to some object, a stream of odour issued, the hollows of each ring being filled with musk. His short mantle was of rich silk, gorgeously embroidered

in an antique pattern of gold and jewels, with devices and mottos intermixed with its scrolls and foliage; his throat displayed a necklace of pearls, with clasps of sapphire surrounded by sparks of diamonds: a high transparent ruff shaded the back of his neck, and a double collar of the same light texture, covered with delicate work, fell on his shoulders. His nether garments were of cloth of gold, the seams and slashes sprinkled and edged with small buttons of jewels of every hue; large bouquets of pearls in his shoes, completed his sparkling costume. His remarkably handsome person, added to the ease and grace with which he wore this profusion of ornament, rendered him the most dazzling and magnificent figure in the procession.

The first glance which he cast on Alix arrested his attention. Her youth, her extreme beauty, and a dignified yet mournful expression in her countenance, very different from all around her, whose faces were lighted up with smiles of pleasure, altogether rivetted his admiration.

"God of love!" said he to Count Coconnas, his companion, "observe yonder deity of beauty; what butterfly just escaped from its confinement has spread its wings with so much glory! it should flutter only in a great man's garden. She is the very personification of Ronsard's description —

> "Amour, jeunesse, et les graces qui sont
> Filles du Ciel, lui pendoient sur le front,
> Mais ce que plus redoubla mon service
> C'est qu'elle avoit un visage sans art!"

The Count Coconnas languidly turned his eyes towards her. "Do you mean that pale beauty who looks scared at the regards of the Queen?" asked he. "Methinks you desire to be singular on this occasion. The Duchess of Nevers becomes her high plume well — 'tis a fashion exquisitely devised for a majestic stature. What a complexion she has! —

> 'Jeune déesse au teint vermeil?'"

He uttered this compliment loud enough to be heard by her to whom it was addressed. The Duchess, at that moment, dropped the bigotelle which held her fan, and Coconnas instantly hastened to present it to her, whisper-

ing, as he restored it, a thousand agreeable nothings, which were listened to with gratified vanity.

There was more wretchedness in that gorgeous assemblage than the delighted and admiring lookers-on dreamt of: there were fear, regret, disappointment, mortification, and despair; — uneasy, ambitious thoughts, and cruel designs, deceit, and treachery, and wickedness. All the principal actors in the scene were disturbed with images "which had no business there at such a time." The beautiful Marguerite stood at the altar blazing in splendour, and eclipsing all in charms, but her bridegroom's heart was far away; it was in the tomb with his beloved mother, whom in his affections no other could replace. The Princess wore a regal crown covered with jewels of great price; her own rich dark hair, contrary to the usual fashion of the day, was arranged in long ringlets, and floated over her shoulders, on which an ermine cape of state was thrown, whose rounded ends descended to her waist in front, and were fastened with clasps of large diamonds. Her flowing train of violet velvet, strewed with fleurs-de-lis, was supported by three princesses of royal blood; her robe was of white cloth of silver, studded with fleurs-de-lis of pearls and other jewels. Nothing could exceed the richness and costliness of her appearance, but her countenance was at variance with the display: her brow was contracted, her cheek flushed, and her carriage haughty and unbending. She went through the ceremony with a cold and unmoved endurance; and so indifferent did she appear to what was expected of her, that when she was required to respond to the demand of the Cardinal-priest, her brother, King Charles, observing that she remained silent, placed his hand at the back of her head, and bent it down in sign of assent. The unhappy Marie de Cleves, pale as marble, and stupified with grief, was supported on all sides by her friends, who in vain endeavoured to conceal the state in which they found her. Her bridegroom, with averted looks, appeared unconscious of the repugnance she exhibited, and was only roused from his apparent reverie by observing that, as the service ended

which made her his wife, she had fainted in the arms of her sister, the Duchess de Nevers.

CHAPTER X.

THE SUPPER AT COURT.

Sledge. Forks?—what be they?
Meercraft. The laudable use of forks
Brought into custom here as they're in Italy,
To the sparing of napkins.—BEN JONSON's *Devil's an Ass.*

A SERIES of entertainments was announced in all the palaces of Paris in honour of the propitious nuptials which had just taken place. Night and day nothing was to be heard of but rejoicing and festivity, and it seemed as if the business of every-day life would never be resumed. Amongst the most curious and conspicuous of these fêtes was one, the features of which were so peculiar as to deserve mention. The evening's pastime began with a grand ball, given by King Charles to the newly-married pair, and to all the great officers of state and chief magistrates of the city. After dancing was ended, a ponderous masque commenced, in which most of the royal party bore a share. First appeared on the scene, moved by machinery, four enormous rocks, silvered over, where marine gods were seated, bearing various instruments of music, on which they played with infinite skill. As these disappeared others advanced, varied by representations of mermaids, dolphins, and other strange creatures, reclining amidst bowers of coral and sea-weed, shells and pearls. On the highest of these moving rocks appeared beneath a canopy, supported by silver pillars, a god of the sea, personated by the celebrated singer Estienne le Roy, looked upon at that time as the very greatest of all artists, whose melodious voice enchanted all hearers, and who poured forth from his exalted position a flood of music capable of melting the rock on which he sat, if the enthusiastic encomiums lavished upon him by the fashionable audience

assembled were to be believed. After these animated mountains had removed themselves, came a splendid gilded chariot, drawn by sea-horses, on which other marine animals of large dimensions appeared to sport, holding in the folds of their wreathed tails an immense shell of gold, within which sat enthroned Neptune, presented by King Charles himself, holding his trident, and guiding his aquatic subjects by means of glittering reins. Other cars of a similar description next appeared; and the prince-gods within them, descending to earth, each selected a lady, and with her trod the mazes of a dance, whose grace and beauty was admired and applauded beyond all the wonders which had preceded it.

The supper which followed was hailed, both by the actors and spectators, with infinite satisfaction; and even the fastidious taste of the great critic of fashion, La Mole, was almost satisfied with the elegant arrangement of the tables, on which appeared the enamelled dishes of Limoges, holding meats of the most exquisite description. Vases of wrought gold and painted cups, the sculptures and figures of which proclaimed by their beauty the hands of the great masters Palizzi and Celini; saltcellars by the same wondrous artists, and carved and richly ornamented knives; spoons of ivory, whose handles were worked in transparent patterns, as if spiders or fairies had fabricated them; and the newly-introduced two-pronged fork, against the effeminacy of using which the preachers of the day inveighed with great bitterness, all were of the most costly and admirable description. The finest wines were in profusion, and due justice was done to the sparkling vin d'Arbois and the clarette, all the respective merits acknowledged of the vintage of Bar, St. Pourcain, Loire, St. Jangon, Galardon, Grenache, and all the infinite variety of muscadins, which were peculiarly appreciated by the fair guests who partook of them.

"It cannot be denied," said La Mole to a friend, "that this entertainment is as well arranged as it is possible for so heavy and crowded an affair to be. There is, however, no real elegance to be found at royal tables. I mean, shortly, to give a small—a very small—entertain-

ment, to a select few of the princesses, and will show them what these things should be, rather in order to induce them to follow a virtuous example, and so manage that I may not be annoyed by displays of gross grandeur, than with a view to their pleasure; for, to tell truth, except the Lady Marguerite herself, and a few others, I hold them little worthy to appreciate my taste."

Those courtiers who held La Mole to be their master and oracle in matters of elegance, of course from the moment he had spoken thus, looked with a pitying eye upon all the glories which wooed their approbation, and the whole aim of their existence henceforth seemed to be to attain the distinction of an invitation to the fête in perspective; they were careful, therefore, of words, looks, and actions, lest, offending by a shade of rusticity his sensitive feelings, they should lose the envied distinction which would at once stamp their character for fashion with immortal fame.

The next day the lists were prepared in the great court of the Louvre for a match of running at the ring. After there had been a few courses, the King was drawn aside by some of his party, who communicated to him that in the Pré aux Clercs had been remarked, that morning, a concourse of persons mounted, who paraded about without any apparent cause; also, that in many of the places in Paris people assembled wearing pistols, carrying arquebusses and other weapons, contrary to the express command issued that no arms should be borne during the festivities. The Prévôt de Paris, Nantouillet, who had been an invited guest, and was a man of great pomposity and ostentation, bustled about with infinite zeal, and came forward to assure the King that every precaution should be taken to prevent any disturbance.

"But, your Grace," said he, "we are all in so happy a state of peace and bliss at this moment, thanks to your Grace's wise government, that we need fear nothing. The young King of Navarre's followers are so orderly and well-behaved, that I really think it would be difficult to create any annoyance in Paris at this propitious period, he is so much beloved; and as for the fair young Princess Mar-

guerite, the sight of her is enough to repress disorder. Every one hopes to see her one day Queen of France; she has, indeed, the presence of a queen."

Pleased at his own clever manner of conveying a compliment, the Prévôt did not observe the impression his last allusion had made on the King, whose countenance fell. as with some bitterness, which was, however, unheeded by the satisfied Prévôt, he replied, "I thank you for your friendly wishes, Nantouillet, and it shall go hard but before long we show you a few of our court manners in the city, and prove that we deserve all your civilities. Truly we may take some hints in courtesy, which we will not be slow to follow. They tell me your hotel on the Quai de la Vallée is very magnificent."

"Oh, sire," returned the Prévôt, his large fat face becoming scarlet with excitement, while he looked round proudly towards several of the échevins and the Prévôt des Marchands, who stood near, "if your Grace would deign to honour me with judging for yourself, my hotel would in future justly deserve its reputation of illustrious. Though it may not become me to say so, I *do* profess that a larger, finer, better built house than the Hôtel d'Hercule does not exist in Paris. Ay, your Grace, and the cellars are not badly stored either, nor is the larder ill supplied."

"Well, good Nantouillet," said the King, with a significant glance at his brother Anjou, "we will pay you a visit in form, and beware that we find not your boast vain, for we will do justice to all we find."

The elated city dignitary strutted away with great delight to communicate to his envying friends the distinguished honour which had been shown him, and his brain began instantly working to devise a fitting entertainment for his royal and noble guest.

He found Charron, the new Prévôt des Marchands, and his predecessor, Marcel, in close conversation with some of the party of Guise, by whom an appointment was made from their chief to meet him at his hotel immediately on the games being finished. These two worthies, equally gratified at the marked consideration shown them, heard with less vexation of the glory which had fallen on Nan-

touillet, and they all agreed that a period was at length arrived when the superior consequence of the city was properly acknowledged.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SIBYLS.

" Deserted, say'st thou, for a girl abandoned,
A puny girl made up of wa'ry elements!" — LEE.

On returning to his hotel that night from the Louvre, where he had been treated with peculiar attention by the King and his party, the Admiral de Coligni, whose fate forms an important link in this narrative, was much struck with the appearance of the streets. Numerous bodies of troops were constantly to be met with arriving from the country in all directions, and filling every avenue. This appeared singular and unnecessary, when all was peace and good understanding between the parties; and it was with spirits considerably depressed that the Admiral reached his home and his closet, where he gave himself up to musings of a somewhat sad though undefined nature. He was interrupted by the entrance of Labonne, his chief attendant, informing him that a man below desired to be admitted to him.

"What man at this early hour of morning can seek me?" said Coligni.

"It is one in the garb of a monk of the Cordeliers," was the answer. "He says his business is most pressing."

"Admit him," returned the Admiral, after a short pause. "I have letters to write: take him into the hall and let him wait till I summon you again. Give me my papers."

So saying, the Admiral seated himself to indite that last well-known letter to his wife, which she received at the same time with the news of his murder, which after having reluctantly closed and kissed with affection, calling

his page, he desired that the Cordelier should be admitted. A tall man, muffled in a cowl, was ushered into the chamber, who stood for some moments silent, as the Admiral, motioning him to be seated, inquired his business.

"Coligni," said the stranger, solemnly, "my business is of life and death. Attend to what I have to disclose, for much depends on it."

"If," said Coligni, "you are come, good father, to preach to me of your religion, know that too many have tried it, and it is but trifling to attempt my conversion."

He spoke this in a gay tone, anxious at once to rid himself of his gloomy-looking guest, who, however, advancing to him, caught his arm, and throwing back his cowl, exclaimed,

"Admiral! ever incautious and unsuspicious as you are, what should have prevented me from acting as at this moment every Catholic in Paris is ready to do? Why should not a stranger, admitted without question to an unarmed man, have a dagger concealed to rid himself and his party of an enemy?"

"Montgomery!" exclaimed Coligni, "who talks of imprudence? Did you not promise to await at La Rochelle the news I was to send you?"

"True," answered Montgomery. "But a stronger feeling than prudence drew me here. On my arrival in Paris, I sought the concealment of an obscure quarter of the town, where, since the arrival of the Court from Blois, I have been hidden. In the disguise in which you see me, I have contrived to learn much more than can be known in your position. I endeavoured to save Queen Jeanne, but she was convinced too late: let it not be the same with you!"

"De Lorges," replied the Admiral calmly, "you, and many of our party, do the King injustice: he means us well. I have his solemn assurances that he will treat all his Protestant subjects as his children. This marriage has secured all."

"My friend," answered Montgomery, "your honest heart leads you to believe that all around you are noble as

yourself. This marriage, though a bold step, is but a blind for dangerous designs. Catherine is capable of the deepest malice, — the most fearful cruelty; she has sworn to exterminate the Protestants, and she will keep her vow, though it cost her the lives of half her Catholic friends to accomplish."

"You have, I know, too much reason," said Coligni, "to fear and to distrust her."

"You know not half the cause I have," exclaimed De Lorges, passionately, — "you only know of the bitter vengeance with which she has pursued me and mine, from the period when my lance, guided by evil chance alone, entered the brain of the unfortunate King Henry. You know my wife and child died; but not how! The crimes of Catherine make me no longer hesitate to betray her weakness. She loved me — loved me during her confiding husband's life-time, nor did she conceal from me her guilty passion. Perhaps I spurned it with too much contempt, for my conduct, outraging her pride, drew down her vengeance on the head of my beloved young wife, whom she looked upon as her rival. My Agnes died, poisoned by her means; my only son, born during his mother's dying agonies, was stolen from the faithful nurse to whose care I had confided him when forced to fly after the King's unfortunate death: and I have too much reason to believe that Catherine sacrificed the child as well as his parents. I have but lately seen her by whom my son was protected — she is the Protestant nurse of Charles. I must, if possible, see Mabille once more, and then will leave Paris never to return. Neglect not my counsel, but fly with me. This very night I depart."

"De Lorges," said Coligni, "I will indeed reflect on all you advise. As soon as morning dawns, I will seek the King once more, and should I see reason to fear I will hesitate no longer."

The friends then parted, and Montgomery, unmarked in his disguise, returned to his retreat in the Rue St. Jacques, while the Admiral prepared to visit King Charles.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CORDELIER.

" Les bons et vrais dévots qu'on doit suivre à la trace
Ne sont pas ceux aussi qui font tant de grimace.
Hé, quoi ! vous ne ferez nulle distinction
Entre l'hypocrisie et la dévotion ? " — MOLIÈRE.

MATHURIN LUSSAUT the gold-wire drawer, at whose house the disguised Count de Montgomery had concealed himself, stood with his pretty wife, Clarice, of whose beauty he was very proud, as well as of his own remarkably handsome head and long curling hair, at the door of their shop, the sign of the Miroir d'Or, and was complacently looking up at that brilliant appendage, whose burnished glories flashed in the sun and raised the envy of their less brilliant neighbours, who, having mostly been longer married and and longer residents in the Rue St. Jacques, could not exhibit so new and elegant an exterior as the handsomely arranged front of the young tradesman. They were not the only persons at their door; throughout the whole extent of the long street, as far as the eye could reach, might be seen eager watchers, anxiously expecting the coming of the procession led by the Cardinal de Bourbon, abbé of St. Germain des Prés, which was expected to be more splendid than anything of the kind ever seen. Very little business had been going on for some weeks, every inhabitant of Paris being engaged in sight-seeing; a few of the more sober began to wish that the rejoicings were over, as they had too long put a stop to all useful and rational employment. Such was not, however, the opinion of Jean Montault, the host of the Bel Image tavern, whose trade flourished during the festivities, and who could scarcely find hands sufficient to attend to his numerous guests. Cornalet, the grocer, next door, was seen reclining behind his jars, leaning on his elbows, and talking to petit Jacques the cobbler, who had suspended his work and had thrust his head and body out of the dark cell in which his avocations were carried on; while Pierre Blampignon, the torch maker, bustled about from one neighbour to the

other, recounting a thousand adventures which had lately happened to him, in all of which he appeared to have acted the part of a hero. The general theme of discourse was the late marriage of the Princess Marguerite, and the fêtes which succeeded it. All the speakers proclaimed their share in the events, and it seemed, to hear their relations, that but for their assistance nothing would have gone on well, and every particular individual appeared to be convinced that he had received some especial mark of grace or recognition from the high personages whose notice they had attracted. There was some little discrepancy in their descriptions: one mistaking the Queen-mother for the bride, and another singling out various ladies of the train to represent the two brides; but universal satisfaction was at all events diffused, and every one was perfectly contented to suppose that his friend had made a mistake and not himself. "I was as close," said Pierre Blampignon, "to the lady Marguerite as I am to you; and, St. Marie! what a presence she has! her hair is exactly the colour of Maître Lussaut's chains, and shines as brightly."

"What mean you?" exclaimed petit Jacques; "her hair is as black as my shoe."

"And curls all down her back, like a row of corkscrews," added Montault the host.

"I was as close," pursued Blampignon, "to the Bearnais ——"

"As wax," interrupted petit Jacques. "But that his nose is somewhat shorter, I should say he is the moral of neighbour Mamert, the schoolmaster, and nearly as fat."

"Why, where did you put your eyes?" cried several voices; "his nose is as long as Le Grand Francois' himself."

"He is much more like Maître Colin, the embroiderer; but anyhow he looked well in his yellow satin, and so did the young Condé; but the King," said the host of the Bel Image, who was listened to in his quarter as an oracle, "is but poor looking, after all. I like a man portly and commanding, it looks so much better in a procession."

This he said with a complaisant glance towards his own

figure, which, adorned as it was with a long and ample apron covering his full plaited under garments, and just reaching to his expansive calf, answered well to his own ideas of majesty.

"I was as close," recommenced Pierre, "to the scaffolding as the guards themselves, and should have had a full view of the Cardinal only that his back was to me; and, just as he was turning round, a great giant of a halberdier gave me such a thrust, that I was sent head over heels amongst the crowd."

Much laughter followed this account of himself, which disconcerted the little torch-maker, who went on to say, that, immediately recovering himself, he rose from the ground, and throwing his cap in the air, cried at the top of his voice, *Vive le Béarnais!*" Upon which, he assured his hearers that the Prince, with a gracious smile, nodded his head to him, and appeared much gratified. As much of this boast, added by their lively friend, as pleased them, was received by the gay audience, who were ready to be amused at anything.

"Be careful, Maitre Lussaut," said the cobbler, "not to carry your wife too near the court in future, for, they say, the young Navarrois is a *Diable à quatre* for a pretty face."

The blushing Clarice withdrew into her doorway on hearing this piece of gallantry, and her gratified husband invited the party to take a cup to the health of the new-married pair, which was cheerfully agreed to by all, and the host of the "Bel Image" supplied the refreshing draught with alacrity.

"And how," asked Lussaut, "go on the students of late — have there been any more disputes about their right to the Abbot's field?"

"No," answered Montault, "they have been quiet so long, that I think something must soon happen to keep their hands in or they will forget their old trade of worrying the monks. Well, I do confess, good Catholic as I am, that I always rejoice when the students get the better: they are fine spirited fellows, and ready for any game, while the lazy monks do no good for trade whatever."

"No," said Lussaut, "and so profligate a set are they,

that no decent man should let his wife go near them. To be sure, there are good of all sorts: I have a brother of St. Francis lodging in my house now, and a better man cannot live."

"He will do well to keep out of the way of my friends of the University," replied the host, "who respect the Cordeliers so little that they care not for what the cowl covers. I hear there is to be a grand meeting soon of the scholars to fish in the Petit Seine, which, you know, is the great lake in the Pré. If there is not a scuffle with the monks to prevent them, I am mistaken, for they swear no one shall fish there but themselves."

"Well," joined in Pierre Blampignon, "I never could see much difference between the Huguenots and ourselves, except that one eats fish and the other flesh, — but I don't pretend to know much about it."

"Why," returned Montault, "the difference is this: when a man comes to a tavern and asks, 'Well, host, what have you to-day? — any poissons de Bondy, or hareng salé?' I know at once he is a Catholic, — that is, on some days of the week; but if he comes in on a Friday, and calls out, 'Bring me a smoking mess of bouillie, or a pâté de Mayence, and a good bottle of white hypocras,' I see through him at once. But it matters little to me provided he pays; and I cannot think why the King and the Cardinal should make so much fuss about such a trifle. Perhaps, if I were to pronounce, I should say the Catholic is in general the best drinker, and the Huguenot the best eater."

"Well," said petit Jacques, the cobbler, "I hope, without sin, I may say I prefer the heretic; for as he never goes barefoot on a pilgrimage, he must always want shoes."

At this moment a party was seen coming down the street, which Montault recognised as some of his friends the students, and he began to bustle and make preparations for their welcome with great zeal.

"Happy to see you, young masters," he exclaimed, "your visits are rare nowadays. What shall I get for your honours?"

"All you have," exclaimed several of the party; "we

are resolved to have a day of it, as this is to be the last; so spare nothing. Belcastel treats."

As this was said the young student in question threw a well-filled purse to the landlord, calling out in a ringing musical voice, " Here old Montault, *touche là*, — for a few hours hence we may not recollect quite clearly what is owing. Quick! bring us plenty of wine, for we want to be in spirits to greet our old friends the Cordeliers, who will, no doubt, appear in the full force of hypocrisy in a few minutes with all the pious of Paris at their heels."

In effect, as Belcastel spoke, the sound of musical instruments was heard announcing the approach of the solemn procession, expected with the same anxiety as any other of the numerous pageants which inundated the city of Paris at that moment of rejoicing. Religious feeling was, for the time, quite forgotten in the delight of witnessing the singular and magnificent spectacle which vied with the profane shows got up for the entertainment of the people. First came a band of musicians dressed in flowing robes, richly embroidered, and performing airs of so lively a description, that they might well have suited a less solemn occasion. Their nature, however, occasionally changed to slow and serious as they passed any of the numerous monastic or ecclesiastical buildings on their route, and as the train was joined by different members of other fraternities. All the children that could be collected in the Faubourg St. Germain walked barefooted, dressed in white, with garlands of flowers on their heads, each child bearing a lighted torch of wax. This part of the ceremony was extremely beautiful, and a murmur of applause from all greeted the innocent and graceful bands of little penitents, whose rosy faces and smiling lips seemed to contradict the remorse which was supposed to inspire them for sins already or about to be committed. A countless concourse of monks, of the orders of Capucins, Augustins, Pénitens Blanc, Jacobins, and others, was followed by the priests of St. Sulpice and the monks of St. Germain. All these were allowed by the students to pass quietly; but when a long line of Cordeliers of St. Francis drew near, it was with the utmost difficulty that the

prudent host could restrain the impertinent sallies of the students. A spectacle, however, now appeared, which at once put his authority to flight, and, indeed, created great scandal amongst all the lookers-on, for it was a custom fallen somewhat into disuse, and now revived in order to attract more attention to those religious observances which the stricter order of Catholics feared were being neglected. The seven shrines of St. Germain, containing relics of the most sacred nature, were borne along by a great number of monks, almost naked, having, in fact, nothing on but a shirt, — their arms, legs, and feet exposed: in this guise they walked slowly along, chanting hymns, and appearing in a state of ecstatic devotion. At this sight a volley of abuse burst from the lips of the young students; and so far did their insolence carry them, that a quantity of dried peas and beans, with which they were provided, were used to pelt these extraordinary penitents, accompanied by shouts of derision. However, they were at length prevailed on to be reasonable; and, after some contention with the soldiers who attended on this part of the procession, to which some opposition had evidently been anticipated, the holy band of brothers passed on. The Cardinals of Bourbon and Vendôme, followed by a train of meaner dignitaries, closed the scene, and a mixed multitude of idlers, thieves, rioters, and inquisitive gazers, rushed tumultuously through the streets, much to the annoyance and disturbance of the neighbourhood.

As the students were seated at the open window of the tavern, they were able to observe all the passers-by, and after having indulged in much vituperation of the scene they had just witnessed, began to amuse themselves with jokes upon the passengers. Belcastel, who seemed their leader, was a young man of handsome figure and fresh complexion, and with a lively, careless, and independent expression of countenance, frank and prepossessing; his spirits were of the lightest kind, and he looked ready for any frolic that might be proposed. Nothing, however, very tempting appeared, and he suggested that, after finishing their bottle, they should adjourn to the Porte de Bussi, to see the feats of the Italian juggler, with whose per-

formances of throwing the assaguay all Paris had been lately amused. They accordingly sallied out into the street, and had not proceeded far when they observed a Cordelier advancing on the opposite side.

"Hallo! friend," cried one of them, "what do you here? Go back, the penitents are gone the other way. Do you think you have no sins to answer for that you turn your back upon the holy train?"

The monk continued his way without noticing them, when Belcastel said to his companions, — "Comrades, this fellow seems insolent; one of you go and invite him to our grand fishing in the Pré, and see what answer he will make."

A shout of laughter followed, and several of the students, arm in arm, crossed over to the monk, and barred his passage, addressing him in no very reverent manner.

"Young men," he answered, "let me pass: I do not interrupt you, and cannot be detained."

"Indeed," said they; "we will see that. You shall turn back when you are told, and learn to obey the monarchs of the Bazoche, though you think to lord it with your cord and cowl over all the other crowns of the earth."

So saying, they attempted to seize the Cordelier, who, stopping suddenly short, with one blow of his hand swept two of the foremost from his path. "Go, fools!" he exclaimed. "Is this the way you waste the spirit which should lead you to defend your country and your liberties? By such follies as this is France subdued and sunk!"

"What meddling priest dares to say aught against France or Frenchmen?" cried Belcastel, advancing, — while the rest surrounded the monk, and with threats and exclamations tried to force him to turn back with them, vowing that they would carry him to his superior, and see discipline inflicted on him for his sins.

"Idiots!" exclaimed the Cordelier, "you know not what you do, nor the mischief to a good cause by detaining me. If there are any Protestants amongst you, as I judge," he continued, "know that you are insulting a friend, and you may soon stand in need of more than you imagine."

Stand back, gentlemen," said a voice from the crowd which was by this time assembled and enjoying the fray, — and a young man pushing through them, advanced to the students. "This is not fair play," said he; "the Cordelier is one to twenty, and so I take his side were he ten times a monk."

"Ha! Claude, is it you," cried Belcastel, "as usual, always with the weakest; but this is our business, not yours; besides you are no longer one of us, and we are resolved to have our way."

"Not if I can prevent it," said Claude, "you are wrong; this monk offered you no interruption and he shall pass free."

"Well said," exclaimed the monk, "but give yourself no trouble, I am in no danger from these gentlemen, who already draw back, and are ready to hear reason."

"Down with him!" cried a fierce voice, "down with the thief who calls himself a friend of the Huguenots! we will have no more heretics to give us laws while there are good Catholics amongst us."

"Who speaks against the Huguenots?" cried a dozen of the excited students, who, ready for any fray, cared little what was its object.

"'Tis Crucé, the butcher," answered one near; "he is drunk as usual, heed him not." But the conflict had already begun.

Crucé, a gigantic fellow, with his sleeves tucked up to the elbow, displaying his muscular arms, advanced to the Cordelier, whom he seized, with the intent of throwing him down; but to the surprise of all, his grasp was arrested by that of the monk, who, throwing his gown over his arm, sprang upon him, and in a moment felled him to the earth.

"Well done, Cordelier!" cried the crowd, with whom Crucé was in no particular veneration, being known as a brawler and ruffian.

"Give way," cried the monk, "and disperse to your homes; there will be more serious work for you all soon; hold yourselves prepared, — and you, young men of the Religion, be upon your guard, and know your friends from your enemies."

So saying, and with a look of approbation towards Claude, he disappeared amongst the crowd; but not before the revengeful eye of Crucé had tracked him till he entered the shop of Mathurin Lussaut.

Belcastel and some of his friends, with looks somewhat ashamed and disconcerted, now greeted Claude as an old acquaintance, for all the young men of the different colleges professed, to a certain degree, the defence of a common cause against the monks of St. Germain des Prés. And though Claude and Belcastel had not studied together, they had been long known to each other, before either of them came to Paris: the former, however, being by far the more studious, seldom joined in any of the noisy sallies of the companions of Belcastel, and they had not met for some time. Resisting their importunities to join a revel which they had resolved to indulge in, Claude, after a brief conversation, left them, and they separated different ways.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ASSASSIN.

"Where is the villain?—let me see his eyes,
That when I note another such a man
I may avoid him."—SHAKSPEARE.

CLAUDE was returning near the gates of the Louvre, when he remarked a cavalcade of gentlemen issuing from the palace, and observed that the Admiral de Coligny was at their head. He followed the way they took, gratified to see how cheerful and contented the whole party appeared, which circumstance, after the sinister reports which had of late prevailed, was peculiarly cheering, as he doubted not that they had just parted from the King, and had reason to be satisfied with their interview. The Admiral's expressive countenance was highly animated, and he seemed to be repeating some anecdote which excited great merriment amongst his companions. The train proceeded along the Rue des Fossés St. Germain, and as they rode

quickly, they had considerably preceded Claude, who stood up as they passed him, when on a sudden the report of a pistol struck his ear, and loud exclamations followed. Instant confusion prevailed amongst the crowd of horsemen, and as Claude hurried to the spot he perceived with horror that the Admiral had fallen to the ground, covered with blood, and was supported by several of his friends. At the same instant shouts of "Coligni is murdered!" echoed from mouth to mouth.

It was soon discovered that his left arm was frightfully shattered, and one finger of his right hand shot away. Without, however, showing the least emotion of pain, he pointed in the direction of the house from which the fatal aim appeared to have been taken, and a rush was immediately made towards it: a crowd soon assembled, some of the enraged bystanders, uttering loud cries, thundered for admittance at the doors; others endeavoured to scale the walls, and enter by the windows. The suspected house was one belonging to the Canon de Villemur, formerly preceptor of the Duke de Guise. Cries of "Down with Guise! — down with the assassins!" echoed on all sides, as, with a loud crash, the door of entrance was forced in, and the mob gained possession.

While some rushed up the stairs and into the front rooms, Claude by chance, who, excited by grief and rage, had been one of the first to gain admission, penetrated to the back part of the house, where, finding the doors fastened outside, he leaped from a window which he succeeded with difficulty in opening, and springing with the rapidity and agility of a mountaineer over the wall, which separated him from a small court, caught a glimpse of a man hastily mounting a horse, which was held by another, who seemed urging him to use diligence, and the words, "Well aimed, Maurevel!" struck his ear. The next instant he darted forward, but the horseman was already out of sight, and the person who had assisted him was flying with the utmost precipitation. The voice which had uttered those few words was familiar to Claude's ear; the figure of the fugitive was not less so. With a swiftness which seemed like that of lightning, he pursued him

along the cloisters of the building, and with a sudden spring seized him in a powerful grasp, from which he endeavoured to free himself in vain, while Claude recognised, with a shudder of horror and an exclamation of indignation, the features of René Bianco.

"Villain! — traitor!" cried Claude, "you are my prisoner. You have named your accomplice, and there remains but to confess who is your employer."

"Claude," exclaimed René, struggling violently, "what means this treatment? — do you know me?"

"I know you," cried Claude, "for an assassin and a coward, and will deliver you to the justice which awaits you."

He then called loudly, and endeavoured to drag the Italian towards the house.

"Unhand me!" fiercely shrieked René; "unhand me, or my dagger shall teach you wisdom."

"I fear you not," retorted Claude, "though it were as deadly as all the poisons of your accursed land can make it. Murderer, you shall be known!"

"Beware!" said René in a low voice, as he clenched his teeth, and his countenance became livid with malignity; "beware how you make me your enemy. Once more, loose your hold! — But it matters not — If they take me, what have I to fear?"

The loud exclamations of Claude had by this time brought to the spot a numerous party. Bianco was instantly secured, and it was with some difficulty that the mob was prevented from doing summary justice upon him when Claude related the circumstances of his capture, and the assistance he had afforded to the probable assassin. After having given the required promise to appear in evidence against him when called upon he quitted the scene, and hurried home, agitated with thoughts of the most alarming nature, and fears for the future which seemed but too likely to be realized.

The attempted assassination was soon the universal theme throughout Paris, and great consternation and grief ensued: the wounds of the Admiral, though severe, were not mortal, but the fact of the crime having been perpe-

trated struck terror into the minds of all. The Duke de Guise was openly accused, as it was well known that he had never abandoned the belief that the Admiral was guilty of the death of his father, through the means of Poltrot, however clearly the contrary had been proved. When the news was brought to King Charles, his fury knew no bounds: he hesitated not to name his mother, his brother, and all their partisans, as the authors of the deed; and it was only when Catherine, after allowing the first burst of feeling to subside, sought his presence, and, joining with him in indignant exclamations of sorrow and regret, proposed that they should go together to visit the sick-bed of the supposed victim of De Guise, that he was pacified. What took place between the mother and son afterwards, events but too fatally explained.

Half an hour after that interview, the Catholic inhabitants of the streets in the neighbourhood of the Admiral's dwelling, were ordered to give up their houses and accommodations to his Protestant adherents. A muster-roll was made in every part of Paris, and the deceived members of *the Religion* were exhorted to seek safety against the barbarous plans of the party of Guise, in the protection of their friend the King. The King of Navarre was requested to send all the soldiers of his party, and all the people he could spare to the Louvre, as the Court entreated his assistance against the suspected Guises. All these precautions succeeded to admiration; the enthusiasm of the Protestants was at its height, at the generous conduct of King Charles, and their loyalty excited to defend him from the menacing danger.

One circumstance alone caused general surprise and dissatisfaction. Many attempted to explain it by affirming that the whole affair had originated in mistake; yet it was not without comment that René Bianco was seen to take his station about the person of the Queen-mother, as usual, after having been detained only a few hours in custody.

CHAPTER XIV.

LES CARRIÈRES DE ST. JACQUES.

"Of horrid shapes and sights and *deeds* unholy."—MILTON.

THE city of Paris stands upon an exhausted quarry, which extends for leagues beneath the surface, its hollow caverns and vaulted chambers spreading far and wide. Formerly the sight of the catacombs gave an idea of their vastness; but as that avenue is closed, their mysterious wonders are now left to the imagination, which can scarcely exaggerate their fearful depth and appalling length.

These caverns or carrières were long inhabited by a fraternity which went by the name of "Les Mauvais Garçons," being simply all the robbers, pickpockets, coiners, murderers, and other malefactors of Paris, who found safety from pursuit in the murky retreats of those dreary abodes,—as to follow them into their dens was a service of danger not to be attempted by the uninitiated.

The caverns of the Chemin d'Issy and d'Enfer had long possessed the reputation of being peopled by myriads of infernal spirits, as the noises they made sufficiently testified, and the Diable de Vauvert was an accredited imp in whom it were treason to disbelieve. There were communications between almost all these widely-separated excavations, known only to the gloomy habitants of the place, and never revealed to the dwellers on upper earth. Those of the Carrières St. Jacques were amongst the most considerable, and it was to one of the most frequented parts of that region that the Florentine René Bianco's course was bound on the evening of the day on which the attempt had been made on the Admiral's life.

For this purpose, no sooner was he freed from durance, than he repaired to the Rue St. Jacques, and entered the shop of Crucé, the butcher, situated nearly at the extremity of the street leading to the route d'Orléans.

"Oh! you are come at last," said Crucé, in a gruff voice, as he entered; "we have been waiting for you, and

begin to be impatient; so little work has been done of late that the trade does not thrive, and some begin to murmur. It's hard a man can't live by his calling: what's the use of Court friends if we're to be poorer than ever."

"As usual, grumbling ever!" said René in a gay tone; "but I have news which will brighten up all your hearts, —ay, and we must lose no time either. Let us instantly to the quarries, where I suppose my friend Captain Florio, our new comrade, is already arrived!"

"Ancelin, the dwarf, was here but now," answered Crucé, "and tells me he is just come with a band of thirty. If you have no work for us it is only bringing so much more trouble; we have had promises and fine words enough of late."

Growling and surly, the gigantic ruffian took a small lamp from a hook in his shop, which he gave to René, and provided himself with another, and after fastening his door and window proceeded with the Italian to the back court of his house, where, at the foot of a small round tower built into the newer walls which surrounded it, he entered a cellar with his companion, and by the help of his lamp discovered a flat stone, which he raised by pressing his foot upon one corner, and a dark flight of steps was evident beneath it. These they descended together, and groped along a dark passage for nearly a quarter of a mile, occasionally coming to openings, wide and rugged, which their lamps served to show in all their gloom. Sometimes they had to climb over huge blocks of slippery sandstone, on which the continual dropping from the roof fell in streams: here and there yawning chasms appeared beneath their feet, whose depth it was fearful to imagine, and high arches and vaults seemed to conduct to different chambers, where nothing but blackness was perceptible, and where numerous bats, scared by the lights they carried, flitted along with short, shrill cries.

"Mort Dieu!" said René, "these quarries are most convenient places, — what would the fraternity do without them? — but I must confess it is not quite so pleasant or so easy to walk amongst them, as upon the marble floor of the Louvre."

"I dare say not," said Crucé, with a sneer; "but if you were flying for your life, and I after you, with my good axe in hand, as many a one has done before now—I fancy you'd get on a little faster than you do. However, we are nearly arrived at the Trou de Malaise, where the band are waiting for us. Hilloa! ho! ho!" and as he spoke, he exalted his voice, and the echoes round took up the sound which soon reached the ears to which it was intended to convey a note of greeting.

A responding shout was returned, and, after a little more climbing and slipping, the pair were in the presence of their comrades.

The chamber or hall in which the confraternity were all assembled, presented features of great peculiarity. It was one of the largest and highest of the many around, and formed, as it were, the centre of a star, from which numerous rays diverged, for in every direction spread out, in long lines of darkness, mysterious paths, conducting to other caves at different distances. The fire which burnt in the middle of this cave, threw upon the surrounding walls a glare of fitful light, which exhibited its decorations in startling clearness.

Opposite the entrance, towering to the roof, stood the Mère de Mal herself, as a block of hideous form, once worshipped as an idol, was called. Round at various heights were exhibited monstrous skeleton forms, dug at different times out of the quarries, some appearing of the shape and size of crocodiles, but having attached to their scaly backs enormous fan-formed wings, others like hogs, but of gigantic proportions, and with horns and tusks of wondrous strength; a few bore the semblance of toads, but larger than the largest tortoise, with grinning mouths and long sharp claws. Some were like birds, with necks elongated in an incredible manner, and with heads almost human in their hideousness. Instruments of various kinds were piled on the floor, and weapons in heaps were to be seen scattered about.

At the vaulted entrance of this cavern stood a man of middle age, dressed in the ordinary garb of a mechanic, but who, from the command he appeared to take over the

rest, seemed to be the chief person there. He was greeted by Bianco as Maistre Larondelle, and a somewhat surly recognition took place between the butcher, Crucé, and this worthy, — intended, however, to convey expressions of good fellowship.

He marshalled his guests into the interior, where, in groups, some seated round the fire, some standing or reclining near their grim-looking household gods, a party of not less than fifty men were discovered.

A murmur of satisfaction ran through their ranks, as Larondelle announced Bianco, and a tall man, wrapped in a large dark mantle, starting forward, embraced him, uttering words in Italian expressive of his pleasure in meeting an old friend. The dress of this man was peculiar; as his cloak was thrown aside it revealed a highly-ornamented garb, where gold embroidery and rich colours were conspicuous. In his party-coloured sash he wore pistols and two daggers; his high-crowned hat was much pulled over his eyes, across its crown was a bunch of hawk's-feathers placed in front, and ribands of various hues adorned it to the top of the cone. Some of the many he introduced to René as his followers, and described them as gentlemen of fortune, escaped, like himself, from the galleys not long since, and now fully prepared to execute any scheme which might be proposed for their profit and the good of the community. René addressed him as Captain Florio; congratulated him on his fortunate escape from his enemies, and took upon himself to make him better known to the assembled party, with whom, he would probably in future, have much in common.

"This," said René, presenting to him the short, thick-set, low-browed man of scowling aspect who presided, "this, you must know, is my good friend Larondelle the coiner, director of our band, and chief adviser, who has done much service to the company, and whose ingenuity is equal to his courage."

This was received with a suppressed laugh by some present, to whom the latter quality attributed to this distinguished individual was not so well known as the former. Larondelle slunk back with a dissatisfied glance, while René continued: —

"This is Aignan Thué, the mercer, who has a good shop of his own in the Rue des Carmes, not far from the dwelling of the good Fathers, whose example has greatly benefited his morals. And here I am proud to see my excellent comrade Ancelin, who resides in any part of Paris where he conceives he may be most useful to his neighbours, and whose general knowledge of the locality those of your troop who may not be well acquainted with Paris will find most valuable."

The figure who was the object of René's present discourse was a diminutive man with a large head, long arms, and body squeezed into a small round shape like that of a spider. He had squinting eyes, and very projecting teeth, of which he appeared proud, for he was in the habit of constantly exhibiting them, having apparently so lively a disposition that the slightest circumstance excited his risibility. He was an especial favourite with his friends, being prone to entertain them with the most amusing details of various feats of mischief he was in the daily habit of performing, and being unwearied in the pursuit of any object which was pointed out to him as worthy of employing his talents.

"This respectable tradesman," resumed René, indicating a fierce dogged-looking man in a corner of the cave, on whom the light of the fire shone and gleamed on his rugged features and red hair, — "is Flé, the best butcher of the quartier St. Jacques, who is also captain of that district, his good conduct having recommended him to the discriminating magistrates who preserve order amongst our fellow townsmen; and this is the celebrated Captain Roy, truly a *king* of good fellows, who resides in a remote quarter, but grudges neither time nor distance to serve the cause he has embraced. The rest of our friends I have no doubt congeniality of feeling will soon make known to you: to enumerate them would take too much time, which is precious with us all. I must immediately proceed to inform you of the object for which we are here assembled, and I am sure it is one in which you will all rejoice."

The banditti crowded round him as he spoke, and eagerly listened to his harangue.

"Many of you no doubt remember the times before the first son of Henry II. reigned, when to meet a Huguenot in the street was to attack him; when to see the door of a Huguenot's house open was to enter and pillage it; and when to inform against a meeting of these heretics was to secure honour and fortune to you, and the stake or the river to them. These happy days have been expiring by degrees; but you will be surprised to know that even at this instant, when the two parties are just united in the strictest bonds of amity, they are to be revived. You look incredulous — but hear me. They are suspected, or said to be suspected, it matters not what the truth may be, of having conspired against the state: their plots are discovered, and instead of the massacre of thousands of good Catholics which they intended to perpetrate, it is resolved that the same drama shall be acted by the true believers. To be brief, the hour is fixed, and when the clock strikes two on the eve of St. Bartholomew, the work must begin — nor will it end until not a single Huguenot is left in Paris, nay, throughout France, for the word is already given, and in every province the same execution will take place. Be ready, then, my friends, to contribute your share to the general good, and hold yourselves prepared to obey the King's commands, and gain booty and honour."

A loud shout of approbation interrupted his discourse, and cries of "Long live Charles the Ninth!" "Down with the Huguenots!" resounded through the caverns, while some of the new comers, who were Italians, Spaniards, Corsicans, and natives of all nations, devoutly crossed themselves, at which action the free-thinking part of the fraternity, or those who were in the habit of paying their vows to La Mère de Mal, were amused or disgusted as the case might be.

"But what has become of Maurevel?" inquired Thué the mercer: "has he made good his escape?"

"Yes," replied Captain Roy, "the fool has got safely off; but he deserved to be taken for missing so near a shot."

"True," said René; "but he did his best. It was not my fault that you were not employed: the deed would

have been done at once, and much trouble spared; but Guise insisted on his man, and we were obliged to agree. However, there will be no failure now, as our plans are excellent."

"How came it that the groom who brought Maurevel his horse was allowed to be taken?" asked Crucé sulkily.

"That," replied Bianco, "is a mere pretence; he will be released immediately: it was only to give a colour to the proceedings, and to humour the King, who could not be gained over at first; but he consents to anything now. You see, my friends," he continued, "we shall have great opportunities; if any little private affair has annoyed us, it can be settled without trouble, for how can it be prevented that some Catholics should fall in the confusion, and who is to inquire how they met their fate?"

"Oh excellent — brave thought!" giggled the dwarf Ancelin; "I have two or three little matters which I shall be glad to set at rest."

"And I," growled Crucé: — "there can be no harm in pulling off the hood of a Cordelier if one can catch him, I suppose?"

"By no means," said René; "every man is at liberty to use his discretion."

"I shall use mine," muttered Flé. "There are more butchers than are necessary in the Rue St. Jacques, and to get rid of a few will make the trade flourish all the better."

"Ha, ha!" screamed Ancelin; "what a comical fellow you are; it does me good to hear you. I suppose we need none of us fear to show ourselves in Paris now, as the way is so nicely paved for us?"

"I advise," said René, "that you all keep as close as you conveniently can till midnight on the 24th, when you can come forth, and circumstances can guide your movements. I shall require some of your aid, as I propose to be very busy in the mêlée, having some interesting business to transact which will require experienced hands."

"Command us!" cried several voices: "we are yours for any service."

It was then agreed between them when and where the chosen friends of René were to meet; and having discussed

several other questions, the favourite of Queen Catherine took his leave, returning by another outlet to St. Jacques du Haut Pas, from whence he speedily made his way across the faubourg, and regained the route which led to the river: as he prudently concluded that it might be as well to avoid being seen by the neighbours of Crucé leaving his domicile at so late an hour as that at which he and his worthy companions separated.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HÔTEL D'HERCULE.

"Perplex'd in the extreme."—SHAKSPEARE.

WHILE these scenes were taking place in the carrières of the city of Paris, the Duke of Guise, to whom the principal arrangement of the whole business had been given by the Queen-mother, and who accepted with avidity the charge which placed his detested foes in his power, was busied in preparing the grand tragedy in which he was to distinguish himself. Great had been the discomfiture of the Prévôts on learning from him the services required of them, which were at first so cautiously communicated, that they were at a loss to understand them. At length the Duke explained that a plot had been discovered by which the Huguenots proposed to make themselves masters of Paris, and to murder the King and all those who resisted them; his communication ended in the following announcement: —

"We have deliberated and have come to the decision that the only method of delivering ourselves from the persevering treason of these heretics is by one great blow to rid the country of them for ever. Let the signal of slaughter be the tocsin of the city, as with us it shall be the bell of St. Germain de l'Auxerrois: when that strikes two, let every man fall upon his neighbour, and, without distinction of age or station, kill every traitor he meets with. Let the Catholics be distinguished from their foes

by a white cross on their hats and a white handkerchief on their left arm; the sleeve of their right must be tucked up to the elbow, in order to give them greater facility in the work of just destruction."

With terror and amazement did Charron and Marcel hear these orders, and by every evasion seek to obtain exemption from them, but sternly and angrily De Guise insisted; and delivering to them a written order from the King, their scruples were at length apparently overcome, and they departed to take all the necessary measures for the execution of a deed which the eloquence and art of the enemies of the unfortunate Huguenots had convinced them was necessary for the preservation of France.

Nantouillet, the Prévôt de Paris, was busily occupied in his hotel, on the Quai de la Vallée; he had just taken a survey of all the rooms, and walked with elated mien through the fine painted galleries, where were represented the labours of Hercules, which circumstance had given its name to the house. These paintings were justly celebrated, and indeed it was difficult for art to be carried beyond the architectural ornaments of exquisite grace which the whole mansion displayed, and rare was it to find in Paris a finer collection of the works of the great masters, most of them acquired in the time of Francis I. Nantouillet, who had made a large fortune in trade, had bought the house as it stood, with all its riches, for an immense sum, paid to the crown; for the hotel was one of those which had been confiscated, in consequence of the attainder of its original master, the unfortunate Count de Montgomery, for whose marriage it had been furnished in so splendid a manner. A few additions made to it by the rich citizen had added, if not to its classical beauty, at least to its gorgeousness, and just at this period nothing was more talked of than the magnificence of this abode. Nantouillet was always proud of his possessions, but had never been more so than lately, since the King had condescended to promise him a visit.

"I will," said he, mentally, "give those princes such a fête as they have seldom seen before, and exhibit to them such a store of plate as will amaze them, for I flatter myself

there are not many Parisians who can afford to entertain them in greater style. Madame Marion," said he, to his housekeeper, "take special care that every thing is in the best order, for, since his Grace deigns to honour me, I would fain show him something worth the trouble of coming for."

Madame Marion, who was not fond of dictation, answered rather sharply, "Who doubts it? when did I ever neglect any thing?—who imagines there is an hotel in Paris to compare with this? But why do you invite all these gay gallants of the Court, who sneer and laugh at every thing, and, do what we will, never allow that we of the bourgeoisie can equal them?"

"Of the bourgeoisie! why Marion, what do you mean?" said Nantouillet, angrily: "havn't I money enough to buy them all round? havn't they been glad to pawn their estates to me? their jewels and their family plate?—what have they to show that I havn't double?"

"Birth,—birth!" said old Marion. "Don't storm and fume—you can't make out a better case to me than the truth:—didn't I live with your father at Orleans when he carried on his business as an apothecary?—and if it hadn't been for my care, would he ever have been such a rich man and left you all this money? But since Madame Marie Touchet, your niece, came to Paris, we hear of nothing but kings and princes,—too much of them, I fancy, for honest citizens: take my word for it, the less you have to do with them the better."

"Hold your peace, Marion!" said Nantouillet, with dignity; "I know my station, do you remember yours. My niece, Marie Touchet, knows a great deal about the court, and is much respected there, and I intend that she shall do the honours of the Hôtel d'Hercule when the royal party honour me with their visit. It will be a grand affair. I shall invite Marcel and Charron, merely to show them how I can live. I know they will die with spite, but that I do not care for—'t will be such a triumph!"

"Here they both come," said Marion, "and you can give your invitation directly then."

As she spoke, the two Prévôts were announced, and

Nantouillet, with much satisfaction, welcomed them, and insisted immediately on taking them into his new gallery, which he assured them was more exquisite than any of the others. "It is," said he, "entirely built in my own taste, and is the only room I really like in the whole of this fine house, because I have entirely arranged it according to my fancy."

The Prévôt de Paris here paused, for he perceived that his two friends were not attending to him, but were conversing with each other. Their countenances were so grave and sad, that the vain dignitary was arrested in his career of taste, and looked at them with anxious curiosity.

"We are not come, Nantouillet," said Charron, "to talk on these matters, but on others much more grave, — I would I could say as agreeable: — but we have a fearful commission delivered to us by the Duke de Guise himself, and we are commanded to impart it to you."

He drew a paper from his pocket, and handed it to Nantouillet, who, casting his eyes over it, let it drop from his hands in consternation, while the deep hue of his cheeks changed to ashy paleness.

"Ste. Marie! — blessed Martyrs! — holy St. Geneviève defend us!" exclaimed he — "murder all the Huguenots in cold blood? Can it be required of us? Is there no way of avoiding it?"

"None," said Marcel, mournfully. "We must use all despatch in assembling the captains, commissaires, quarteniers, and dixeniers of the different quarters of Paris, and direct them to spread the orders to all their inferior officers and neighbours. Every house harbouring Huguenots must be marked, and measures must be taken to prevent the possibility of their escape."

"But our friends," said Nantouillet: "may we not give information to our friends? may we not warn them of their danger?"

"We must not think of friends or foes," returned Charron; "the orders are peremptory, — our lives will answer for neglecting them. It is a cruel duty, but must be performed. The Huguenots would have done the same by us, but that their plot is discovered."

"The saints be thanked," said Nantouillet; "there are none in my hotel, though I have several excellent friends amongst them who often visit me. Heaven grant they arrive not at this time! What confusion in a house,—a handsome one like this, too!"

"Well," said Charron, "we cannot disobey or delay our order. I must have a thousand men ready this night to act when the signal is given: and having communicated this unpleasant news, I must now leave you, hoping that you will not fail to do all you can in this business—for the best."

The last words were spoken in a significant manner, and appeared to convey a double meaning to Nantouillet, who wrung his hand without speaking, and the other two Prévôts withdrew.

When left alone, poor Nantouillet was in a great dilemma, and divided between his wish to distinguish himself as a chief magistrate, and his desire to show leniency to the devoted Huguenots, to whom he, in common with the greatest part of the reputable citizens, bore no ill will.

While he was musing in this manner, a door gently opened, and he was aware of the presence of a Cordelier whom he had lately known as a messenger from a friend of his at Lyons, from whom this monk had brought him a message of greeting.

"Enter, good father," said he. "I am glad you are come, for I have a few questions to ask which you can perhaps resolve. Do you think it an act likely to give satisfaction to Heaven, and to draw down a blessing on the actor, to—to—to put to death a Huguenot?"

The monk started. "My son," said he, "I understand you not: explain. Ours is a religion of peace, and by it murder can never be approved."

"I think as much," replied the perplexed Prévôt. "Yet a heretic and a traitor, you know, makes it a different thing."

"Are then the Huguenots traitors?" asked the monk. "What are they now accused of?"

"Of a plot, good father," said Nantouillet, "to destroy the King, overturn the state, and massacre all the Catholics

in France. Now, you see, this being known, would it not be just and right, and pleasing to Mother Church, that we should punish them for this intent in their own coin?"

"By massacre?" inquired the Cordelier.

Nantouillet nodded assent.

"And is this measure resolved on?" was the inquiry.

"It is, and must be done: this very Sunday night is the time fixed. Not a Huguenot must be left alive in Paris. It is a dreadful business. There may yet be time, good father, if it would not be a sin, to warn a few of one's friends, if you thought absolution could be obtained for ——

"Doubtless, doubtless, my son," said the monk in a hurried tone; "they may by this means be brought to the true faith. It would be a crime to neglect it: it will be a sin to execute such a command. Does the King himself know of this?"

"Oh, ask me nothing," said the Prévôt. "I must say nothing — I am all confusion!"

The Cordelier's emotion was violently excited; his hands trembled, and his voice was faltering with suppressed feeling, as he uttered, "This is the work of Catherine. I see her hand in it!"

"Good father," said the kind-hearted Prévôt, "you abide in the faubourg St. Germain; could you not contrive just to — I dare not say the word — I would not, you know, be privy to — the Vidame de Chartres — the Sieur de Caumont are worthy men, though heretics — if they knew their danger ——"

"They are at the Admiral's at this moment!" exclaimed the Cordelier, "and must be warned."

The Cordelier approached Nantouillet, and took his hand, which he pressed with fervour. "Fear not, excellent man," he whispered; "there may yet be time. Farewell! and Heaven prosper you. You will see me no more. I have deceived you for some time past: — this robe which covers me conceals a secret which it is not yet time to reveal. I sought your hotel on a feigned errand. One near and dear to me died in yonder chamber, and at great risk I came here, that I might lay me once

more where she lay, and behold the spot where I parted with her, a corpse, for she was murdered by Queen Catherine!"

"In my house!" interrupted Nantouillet.

"Here," said the monk. "I can say no more. I thank you for your pity, and may the blessing of Heaven remain with you!"

In another moment the Cordelier was gone, and the Prévôt stood aghast gazing after him.

"He never named the Saints!" exclaimed he. "He is a Huguenot! A death in my hotel! — how unpleasant. But I will keep it a secret: it would entirely spoil my fête. Alas! this sad business will greatly interfere with my entertainment. I trust it is a storm which will blow over. I do not see my way in the matter. I must consult — Oh! would that I had never been Prévôt of Paris, — the object so long of all my desires!"

The discomfited dignitary threw himself upon a seat, and covered his face with his hands, vainly ruminating, and coming at last to no conclusion. He was only roused by the announcement of his supper; and in the enjoyment of that meal he by degrees lost the intensity of his distress, and began to shape out some plan of conduct which, as a magistrate, it was incumbent on him to pursue.

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO O'CLOCK.

"A wicked day, and not a holy day!"—SHAKSPEARE.

CLAUDE, a prey to uneasy thoughts and fearful reflections on the crime of Bianco and the treachery of the court party, was alone in his chamber anxiously expecting tidings of the state of the Admiral, when a knock at his door announced the presence of a young page, whom he recognised as a domestic attendant on dame Mabille. He delivered to him a billet from the nurse, which contained

these words: — "Come to me on the instant at the palace; I entreat you not to delay." He was struck with the hurried style of the note, and was seized with involuntary dread of some impending evil. He lost no time in following the page to the Louvre, and entered the palace by a private door appropriated to the use of the household.

As soon as he reached the apartment of Mabille, she hastily welcomed him, and with a look of caution led him into an inner chamber, where, after carefully fastening the door and examining the arras, she seated herself, and desiring Claude to approach thus addressed him: — "I have just received a warning which has filled me with alarm and uncertainty. This paper was conveyed to me in a sugared sweetmeat, thrown from a gallery of the palace as I passed through one of the halls." She opened a small slip of paper, and read — "'You are safe; but if you have a Huguenot friend, bid him take heed of midnight.' I am," said she, "in great perplexity: some danger is evidently at hand. Judge if my fears have justly interpreted. I am about to confide to you a secret which, I know, will be safe in your keeping. Alix, the daughter of the President Bailly, is a Protestant. René Bianco has asked her hand in marriage of her father, and his consent, in spite of the odium which now attaches to him, will not, I fear, be withheld: but Alix has a vow in Heaven against the union, and I know her resolution can never be shaken. What if this warning should point to some danger threatening her? What if René, aware of her aversion, has discovered her religious opinions, and has some diabolical plan in agitation?"

"Oh God!" cried Claude, every nerve trembling with emotion, "what can be done to save her! It is but too plain, — he meditates a fearful revenge. Midnight! — the time is not far distant. Has she no suspicion of her danger? Have you not ——"

"No," interrupted Mabille. "It is to you alone that I venture to communicate my fears, and would place you on your guard against a possible evil. At the time mentioned see that the house is well secured, — and sleep not till the hour of peril be past. Go, then, my dear Claude, — for-

give the fears of one who has known so many afflictions that she haply starts at shadows; if we are deceived, the suspicion can perish in oblivion."

"I will hasten back without a moment's delay," cried the impatient Claude. "Oh! Mabille, you know not how dear is the charge you have entrusted me with."

Hastily clasping Mabille's hand, he sprang to the door, but his extreme agitation, as he supposed, prevented his opening it. He pressed the spring in vain, it yielded not. Ashamed of his awkwardness, he exerted his strength, — still the door resisted. Mabille advanced, half-smiling, in spite of her anxiety, at the consequence of his impetuosity, — half-vexed at the delay, but she found her efforts equally unavailing.

"It is strange!" cried both at once, as they united their endeavours, but to no purpose.

"This way!" said Mabille, turning pale; "you can pass by the other door." So saying, she led him through a closet to another chamber; but their consternation was great on finding that door also fastened. Mabille uttered an exclamation of terror. Claude exhausted himself in vain attempts, and paced the room in inexpressible distress.

"What can this mean?" he said: "it cannot be a mere jest; and while I linger, Alix is abandoned. Oh Heavens! is there no means of escaping? — the windows?"

"Alas!" said Mabille, "we are in the highest part of the palace." Claude, however, had rushed towards them, and throwing open one observed with dismay its immense height from the ground.

It looked into the outer court of the palace, and he remarked that the space below was nearly filled with armed men, — while, as he stretched his view beyond, he saw lights moving in all directions, and a confused murmur of voices was borne to him upon the wind, mingled with the clashing of armour and the movement of horses.

Both he and Mabille gazed hopelessly from their elevated situation, each moment increasing their distress of mind. They wearied each other in conjecture, and in this manner

several hours passed away; but as midnight approached, the fears of Claude for Alix rose almost to distraction, and Mabille wept and prayed alternately in all the agonies of anxiety.

The hour of midnight tolled, and with a shudder they counted each stroke of the bell. Suddenly they perceived that all the windows in the palace, as far as they could see, were illuminated: the murmur of voices and the clanking of steps became more audible. One o'clock sounded, and the clamour below seemed rather to increase. At length the great bell of the opposite church of St. Germain de l'Auxerrois struck two, and its deep, hollow tone, distinctly heard by the prisoners, was intermingled with the loud beating of the palace clock. A few moments elapsed, when the clamour from the court grew louder and louder. Claude bent from the window at which he was stationed: the clear moonlight shone with dazzling brilliancy as if in mockery of the lights which appeared in all directions; but the heavy balconies, and their projecting ornaments, concealed much from his view. Occasionally he caught glimpses of moving figures, some bearing torches, others drawn swords and bayonets. Suddenly a yell, loud, terrible, and continuous, resounded through the air, followed by a tremendous discharge of musketry, amidst the din of which were discernible shouts of exultation, appalling shrieks, agonised cries. Within, without, the tumult raged; the air seemed peopled with yelling demons, and sounds so horrible, that human nature shuddered to hear them, rang through the brain of Claude and his affrighted companion, as they stood alone, speechless with horror, gazing on each other with starting eyes, doubting whether fear had not deprived them of reason, and that the howling sounds around were not the creation of their disordered imagination.

Louder, more frequent, and more appalling, grew the shouts and cries, mixed with the stunning report of cannon. "The Guises! the Guises!" shrieked Mabille; —"the King! the King! my poor child! they have besieged the palace and will murder him, while I am kept from him by bolts and bars!"

Overcome by the fearful vision her imagination had conjured up, she fell senseless on the floor; while Claude, utterly unable to assist her, stood aghast and immovable with horror. The dreadful truth flashed upon his mind, — a cry reached him, — and the hideous nature of the tumult was revealed: — words of frightful meaning echoed in his hearing, "Kill! kill! — leave none alive! — down with the Huguenots! — strike! — the King commands — strike, in the name of the blessed Virgin, and exterminate the heretics!"

The massacre of St. Bartholomew had begun.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CONSENT.

"I should have thought of heaven and hell conjoined —
The morning star mix'd with infernal fire —
Ere I had thought of this." — JOANNA BAILLIE.

In the house of the president Bailly all was tranquillity. Alix, however, had not retired to rest: her mind was occupied with a thousand thoughts which chased each other in quick succession. She shuddered as she recollected the looks of the Queen-mother, and the presumptuous bearing of Bianco, his lately-discovered crime, and his extraordinary enlargement, and with grief and fear she remembered that her father appeared but little to enter into her feelings of indignant horror of this act.

One thought, in spite of all her efforts, she was unable to banish: it returned again and again, and would intrude in spite of her struggles to suppress it — the image of Claude Emars — her deliverer — her friend.

The night wore on, and in the silence of her chamber she wept for some time, abandoning herself to melancholy fancies: at length, reproaching herself for thus permitting sorrow to usurp the place of that resignation which the pure faith she had adopted ought to inspire, she knelt and

offered to Heaven the homage of an afflicted and innocent heart.

As she rose from her knees, the bell tolled two, and a few minutes after she heard a loud knocking at the outer gate. She started up in alarm and ran to the window; the sounds without grew louder and more violent, and she saw by the moonlight a figure glide swiftly along the court, and unbar the door with precipitation, when in an instant the whole space was filled with armed men, whose gestures bespoke no peaceful errand. The glare of torches and the blaze of light beyond showed the features of men of fearful mien, and all doubt of their hostile intentions was soon dissipated when Alix heard their vociferous exclamations, which appeared but the echo of a howling mob without.

"Down with the Huguenots!" roared a dozen voices; "deliver up the Huguenots! Kill! kill!—it is the King commands!"

"Merciful Heaven!" she exclaimed, "they will murder the unfortunate Claude!"

Her first movement was to rush to her father's apartment, where having gained admittance, she threw herself into his arms, speechless with terror. Alarm and consternation took possession of the mind of Bailly as he heard the loud yells and the approaching footsteps of the ruffian band which had entered his house.

"My child—my Alix!" cried he, "what is this? Are the plots of the Huguenots ripe, and are we to become their victims?"

"Oh, father! father!" cried Alix, "why will you wrong these unfortunate men?—would we were in their hands! But hark! listen to their cries—they approach—they are here!—oh, mercy! mercy!"

A sudden crash was now heard, and the door of the apartment was burst open, giving admittance to a crowd of ferocious-looking men, at the head of whom the butcher Flé, with a large knife in his hand, such as is used in his trade, and which he brandished fiercely, rushed towards them, and loudly demanded of the President the delivery of his Protestant secretary.

Bailly attempted to speak.

"Your lives are in our hands!" thundered he. "This is no time for words. Where is the accursed Huguenot—the bantling of the Vache de Navarre? Speak, or we spare none in the house!"

"What is your purpose?" demanded the President faintly.

"Extermination to the Huguenots!" cried twenty voices.

Flé advanced to Alix, and laid his huge hand on her delicate arm to drag her from her father, when his action was arrested by the sudden entrance of a man masked, and wrapped in a cloak, on which was a large white cross, similar to those worn by the others.

"Hold, Captain!" he cried, in a voice which vibrated to the heart of Alix; "this is not the chamber: he sleeps not here—we harm no good Catholics. On to the other wing of the house—the Bearnais whelp is there waiting for his fate. The coward hides himself from danger. Follow me!"

As he spoke he darted forward, and all the band, with imprecations and yells, hurried after him.

The room usually occupied by Claude was soon reached, and the door dashed to pieces without delay: with the cry of wolves they sprang towards his bed, and their leader, who was no other than Bianco, brandishing his dagger, cried in a voice hoarse with fury, "Hurra! he escapes me not a second time!" As he spoke he aimed a deadly blow, but what was his amazement to discover that the place was unoccupied, and he had expended his rage in vain. A coarse laugh from his companions added to his passion and confusion.

"Ha! ha! Master René!" cried the facetious dwarf Ancelin, perching himself on the bed's foot, "this is too good a joke; who would have thought that the Huguenotaille could foil a Florentine?"

"This is dull work," said Flé, searching the room in vain, while the others clamoured to be gone.

"Hence, then!" cried René; "you will find occupation enough. Leave me to deal with the doting old man below and his daughter. Away!—to your business!"

With tumultuous zeal his comrades hurried into the street, leaving René on his way back to the President's room. Infuriated with disappointment, he no longer attempted disguise, but rushed into the presence of Bailly and his daughter, clamouring vehemently that they should discover to him the retreat of Claude.

"Bianco," said the President, "I was ignorant of his absence, and have no power to direct you to him."

"It is false! — it must be false!" cried René; "but you seek to protect him in vain." Then turning to Alix, whose terror scarcely allowed her to breathe, he continued, — "Alix, do you love your father or this low-bred menial best? The mob is at your gates. Hark! they are massacring on every side! — they pause not to inquire who are their friends; and when they rush into your house, tell me who will save your father from their fury? I can do so, and I alone."

"Oh, save him — save him! and let me perish only!" shrieked Alix.

"Both shall be safe but on one condition," he answered. "Your father's word is given; it remained but for you to ratify it. When the murderers return, as they will do, — already I hear them, — their swords and pikes are gleaming in the light of the burning houses, — their shouts are nearer; — do you not hear them?"

"Oh, yes — yes!" cried the terrified girl: "is there no way to save my father? Speak! what can I do to prevent his being butchered in my sight?"

"Acknowledge yourself my wife!" cried René, seizing her wrist and dragging her to the windows, where a frightful spectacle presented itself of flying wretches pursued and hewn down, blood flowing, houses pillaged and on fire, and a hideous noise of voices, loud in fury, shrieks, groans, and bursts of artillery echoing along the air,—

"Say that you are mine," he repeated, — "as mine you must be, — and even yet it is not too late!"

"Never! — never!" shrieked Alix, breaking from him and rushing to her father. "I cannot, father! it is impossible!"

"Then, President, your fate is sealed. I can protect you no longer: your blood be on your daughter's head!"

As René uttered this in a furious tone, a dreadful tumult was heard. The mob was rushing in at every avenue; already they had gained the ante-chamber. "This way — this way!" roared one amongst them; and in another moment the room was filled with a disorderly band of wretches, their faces distorted with the excitement of recent carnage, — their hands and clothes crimson with slaughter, and their words fraught with vengeance.

A blow from the foremost felled the President to the ground; while René stood by, erect and motionless, gazing on the distracted features of his child. Pikes and swords were advanced — a rush was made — and the life of Bailly was not worth a moment's duration, when Alix, desperate with terror and despair, cried, in a loud and piercing tone, "Save my father! — I am the wife of René Bianco!" A shout from René followed her exclamation, — she heard no more, — she saw no more, — a confused murmur of horrid sounds rung in her ears, — a mass of scowling, grinning faces swam before her eyes, — she fell prostrate on the body of her father, and the next instant they were alone, — the band of assassins had quitted the house, — the doors were barred, and René Bianco had disappeared.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FUGITIVE.

"With what grief was my heart then darken'd! And how did every thing I then saw look like death!" — ST. AUGUSTIN.

In a deep embrasure of one of the windows in a chamber of the Queen-mother's apartments at the Louvre sat a party of ladies, looking out upon the moonlight river which glittered at the foot of the tower. These were the young Queen of Navarre and her friends, whose beauty had obtained them the title of the three Graces. Henriette, Duchess de Nevers, Catherine, Princess de Portien, and

their younger sister Marie, the bride of Condé. A deep sadness, very unusual with them, overspread the society, occasional monosyllables and suppressed sighs alone interrupting the silence. The suspicion under which the Duke de Guise had fallen of having attempted the life of the Admiral, weighed heavily on the heart of the pensive Catherine, to whom it was said he was shortly to be united: her sisters shared her sorrow; but that of Marie was combined with a regret for which she felt that time could bring no cure, and the thoughts of Marguerite were undefinable and full of the deepest melancholy. Suddenly the plash of oars was heard, and a small boat was observed approaching the foot of the tower which projected considerably from the body of the building towards the river. It neared the land, and a young cavalier, masked and covered with a large cloak, leaped on shore, and looking up towards the window where so many fair forms were placed, he drew forth a guitar, and after a short prelude of extreme harmony and beauty, sang the following lines: —

"Thou art to me less than a shade
By fragile leaves of autumn made;
Less than the note of some lone bird
'Midst early spring's first whispers heard,
A weed — a feather on the sea —
All this, and less, thou art to me!

"Why does my trembling fancy dwell
On all that paints thy form too well, —
Why see, where'er I turn, thine eyes
Haunting the streams — the woods — the skies,
Although a place within thy mind
I know my image cannot find?
Less than a kiss in sleep am I,
Without a claim on memory.

"I know all hope thy smile to gain
Is idle weakness, fond and vain,
As vain to look for clouds past by, —
As vain to follow vacancy, —
Tell me what else is vainer yet
That this weak heart will not forget!"

"Ah!" whispered the Duchess de Nevers, "it is doubtless 'Le beau D'Entragues.' How imprudent to come here! Dear Madame Marguerite, your beauty has crazed him, or rather the misfortune of your marriage has made him forget all but his wretchedness. I feared some fatal consequence; for when he quitted the cathedral he was heard to exclaim, 'I have only now to die of regret!'"

"Let us retire from the window," returned the Princess in the same tone, "poor D'Entragues, — I thought his passion only gallantry, — and, indeed, I trust it is no more, and that he merely follows the fashion of our day."

"Alas!" said the Princess de Condé, "how much I pity him!"

"At this moment, the Queen-mother, the Duchess de Lorraine, the King and his brothers entered the room, and much to the surprise of all, for he was supposed to be justly in disgrace — the Duke de Guise, followed by the Duke de Nevers, Marshal Tavannes, and the Count de Retz.

"How is this?" said Catherine, in a stern voice; "why are you still here, Marguerite? it is fitting that you retire to your chamber, as we have business of importance to consult upon, about which you have no concern; — ladies, I do not require your services further, and request you all to withdraw."

All those to whom she spoke immediately made their obeisance and left the chamber; but the young Queen of Navarre lingered still, for her sister of Lorraine had taken her hand, and, grasping it with a convulsive movement, detained her.

Her mother looked angrily towards her, — "Did you hear me, madam," she exclaimed, "or must I repeat my commands?"

"My dear mother," said the Duchess of Lorraine in a low voice, "hear me. Consider what you are doing. Is it well to expose poor Marguerite to so much danger? Why not allow her to stay here? — There will be little safety in the apartments of Henry of Navarre: you know too well there will not."

Marguerite had caught the last words, and turning deadly pale, "What is the matter?" said she; "what danger threatens my husband?"

"Silence!" returned Catherine; "I insist upon her going instantly."

Claude de Lorraine burst into a passion of tears, and throwing herself into her sister's arms, cried out, "O God! Marguerite, my dear sister, do not go."

Catherine's brow became livid with rage; "Am I to be braved by children?" she exclaimed. "Come hither, Claude; leave your sister instantly, and attend to what I order."

So saying, she seized the arm of the Duchess, and drew her into a distant part of the room: the young Queen could not overhear their words; but she saw that the one pleaded earnestly, while the other kept an unmoved and stern countenance.

"It is enough — no harm will reach her," was all she heard, while the Duchess once more approaching, kissed her tenderly, and overcome with emotion left the room. Marguerite did the same, leaving her mother with the party who had entered, and who were all in deep discourse, apparently unconscious of the scene which had been going on.

On reaching her apartments the Princess was surprised to find the King of Navarre surrounded by his Huguenot friends, to the number of thirty or forty.

She was received without ceremony, and observed a gloom on the faces of all, which the subject of their conversation sufficiently explained, for they were speaking of the attempt on the Admiral's life, and vehemently insisting that justice should be done by King Charles on the murderer, whom they hesitated not to name as the Duke de Guise.

"He has quitted Paris," said Henry of Navarre; "cowardly assassin as he is, he fears the consequences of his crime: but our vengeance will yet overtake him. I have seen the King but now. I believe him to be sincere, and doubt not that he will pursue the murderous Guises to the utmost."

Marguerite started; she had left the Duke in the Queen's chamber but a moment, and yet he was represented as at a distance. Why was this deception practised? she trembled to ask herself the question.

She retired into an inner chamber, where her nurse, who was much attached to her, was struck with the paleness of her countenance, and persuaded her to lie down, which she consented to, but her anxiety prevented he

sleeping, for she still heard her husband and his friends in serious and angry discussion. At length Henry of Navarre entered her chamber, and perceiving her in tears spoke in a kind and gentle tone, and begged her to be comforted, — that all would be well.

"I am going," said he, "to the jeu de paume, with some of my friends, — to sleep is impossible to-night; — we shall be ready to wait on the King early in the morning, and I would not have it seem that we are all watching; play will be a sufficient excuse if he should ask for me; let it be known how I am engaged. Adieu, dear Marguerite."

"She started, and a feeling of astonishment, pleasure, and joy, even to agony, took possession of her senses; she had no words to reply, and he was gone instantly. She rose on her couch and put her hand to her heart, to repress its violent beating — this was the first word of endearment Henry had ever used to her — this was almost the first look of kindness he had given her. Cold, unmoved, and silent, he had appeared to endure her presence, but no more; — she had been nothing to him, but apparently an object of aversion, and they met but as cold acquaintances forced upon each other. But he saw her in tears — in tears on his account, and his heart was softened towards the innocent instrument of tyranny which Catherine had placed in his path, as he conceived, as a spy.

He knew little of her he contemned, of her generosity, her noble frankness, her pitying indulgence; her love! yes, — she no longer could conceal it from herself; she loved the husband who neglected her; she adored him who rejected her affection; she, the object of the devotion of so many — for whom d'Entragues's heart was breaking, whom the gallant Bussi lived but to honour; from whom the poets of the time took their inspiration — she who was called Venus Uranie, — she, who saw princes and potentates at her feet, — loved for the first time, and in vain!

Several hours passed away and her tears flowed on; at length, exhausted with weeping, by degrees sleep stole over her, and she fell back on her pillow, her arm supporting her head. By the side of her couch, her nurse,

who believed her to have slumbered long, as she no longer heard her sobs, was reposing quietly. A lamp burnt feebly on a table near, and her book of prayers was open on it, at the passage which she had read before her eyes closed, "Deliver me, oh my God! out of the hand of the ungodly, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man."

The clock of St. Germain de l'Auxerrois tolled two. A fearful dream disturbed the sleep of the Princess: hideous forms, — flames, — seas of blood, appeared before her eyes. She strove to fly, — to shriek: iron chains seemed to bind her to the spot, — terrible sounds were in her ears as of a violent tumult. She started and woke, but the vision was still there! The sound still echoed round her; and a furious knocking at the door of her chamber roused her nurse, who, with terrified looks, listened while they were repeated with frantic vehemence, accompanied by cries of "Navarre! Navarre!"

"Fly to undo the door!" cried Marguerite: "it is my husband! — some evil has befallen him."

The nurse obeyed, and with trembling hands removed the bolt, when a frightful spectacle presented itself to them — a young man covered with blood, which issued from several wounds, darted wildly into the room, and threw himself at the feet of the young Queen. "I am content," he exclaimed, "since I may die here!" Marguerite uttered a shriek of horror, and at the same moment her room was filled with guards, who with loud cries rushed, with swords drawn, towards their victim: their faces were fierce, their eyes rolling, and their gestures full of fury. "Down with the Huguenot! — kill, kill!" were the words she heard, as clasping the wretched man in her arms, she covered him with her body.

"Hold, ruffians!" she exclaimed: "traitors! dare you to murder a subject before the eyes of your King's sister?"

"He is a heretic! — give him up to us: it is the King's commands," roared the foremost assassin, advancing to seize his prey.

Marguerite, with a movement of compassion which overcame her terror, threw her robe over the kneeling

man, who still grasped her firmly round the waist: but another moment would have decided his fate, when a loud voice from without was heard calling to the soldiers to forbear: and Nançay, the Captain of the guard, rushed forward and threw himself between the Princess and the assailants.

"Hence!" he exclaimed. "Idiots, is it here that you waste the precious instants when there are thousands to be dealt with? Away to the lower court, — there the Huguenots are waiting like sheep to be slaughtered: leave this miscreant to me."

He waved his hand, and the troop hurried away with vociferous exclamations of fury; while, turning to Marguerite, he cried, "Madam, it may not be; all of this accursed race are doomed! Give up the prisoner, he is condemned to die."

"No, Nançay!" shrieked the Queen: — "disgrace not the name of a brave soldier by such an act. He is under my protection, and none ever sued for it in vain. What means this violence? Against whom do you war, and who are to be your victims?"

"The Huguenots!" returned he. "This very night every Huguenot in Paris, — nay, throughout France, must die! it is decreed. Hark! the canon — the shouts! — I must to my post. He whom you would preserve, I see, is already dead." As he spoke he dragged the object of his search from the clasp of his protectress: — he had fainted, and gave no sign of life. "Do what you will with him, I ask no questions."

He was rushing away when Marguerite cried after him, — "For the love of the blessed saints, tell me where is Henry of Navarre!"

"Safe," returned the Captain, — "unhurt, in the King's chamber; but how long he may be so, I know not."

"Conduct me thither I entreat, I implore you!" screamed the Princess. "If mercy ever entered your breast, abandon me not at this moment! — if you have a heart, reject not my prayers!" and she clung to him in agony, her long black hair flowing in waves almost to her

feet, her white arms clasping nis knees, her dress disordered and stained with blood, and her face pale as ashes.

The rough soldier gave one glance at her prostrate figure; a shudder passed through his frame. "Rise, madam," he exclaimed, "this is no posture for you. Forgive me, and believe while I have an arm to use you shall not be defenceless. I will conduct you to the King's chamber; there use your eloquence and save the devoted princes. Oh, fatal duty! that I must follow commands so cruel and unmanly!"

Marguerite looked back to her nurse, who was supporting the wounded man, entreated her to tend him if he still lived, and, casting off her upper robe which streamed with blood, hastily covered herself with a mantle and followed the steps of Nançay. Yells, loud and horrible, greeted her passage; discharges of artillery and shrieks and groans stunned her as she advanced; footsteps retreating and pursuing, cries of vengeance and entreaties for pity, — all these sounds came in confused clamours to her ear, as half-dragged along she hurried towards her brother's apartments. The doors of the antechamber were open, and from thence rushed a man pursued by soldiers, who, at a few paces from her, pierced his body with their halberds, and he fell, shrieking for mercy, to the ground. The arms of Nançay received her as she sank fainting, but, recovering her strength, she darted forward, and was clasped to her sister's breast.

"Oh! Claude, Claude!" she exclaimed, "where is my husband?" But before an answer could be returned, renewed cries were heard, and two of Henry of Navarre's attendants, came flying along the corridor, and took refuge in the room.

"Save us, Princess, save us!" they shrieked; "we are pursued, and have no hope but in you."

In another moment the door was closed and locked by Nançay, and the unfortunate men were kept from those who sought their lives, while Marguerite and her sister flew with the speed of terror through the line of chambers, and, reaching the King's bedchamber, fell almost senseless at the threshold.

There sat Charles the Ninth, with a countenance so ghastly that all vitality seemed passed from him: his eyes rolled frightfully, his mouth was partly open, his lips white, and his nostrils distended; his hair seemed lifted from his head, and streamed wildly in all directions; one hand was clenched amongst its locks, and in the other he held an arquebuse. The Queen-mother stood beside him, pale also, but stern, unmoved, and sullen; her large black eyes, fixed upon him, seemed riveted to his countenance, and appeared to hold him as in a spell: one arm leant upon his shoulder, and one hand grasped him as though an iron band were round his frame: the other hand was raised, and the finger pointed, as if directing his attention to scenes which were beyond his vision. A smile of horrible meaning flitted over her cheek as a fresh peal burst on the stillness of that death-like chamber, and shrill screams pierced the tapestried walls. Henry of Navarre and the Prince of Condé were behind; the latter had cast himself on the ground, and tore his hair in agony: the other stood transfixed, having no power to breathe or move: but Marguerite saw that they still lived, and crawling to the footstool of her brother, she cried aloud,—"Charles, as you hope for eternal salvation,—as you look for pardon for this horrible crime, save these from massacre and death!"—she pointed to the princes, for her tongue refused to pronounce their names.

"Away, Marguerite, away!" cried Charles wildly. "It is too late—all must fall—there is no safety but in their destruction. Why do you come with that ghastly look to reproach and torture me? The will of Heaven must be performed!"

"Then you will save them—you will save your own soul? Brother, dear brother, have I not loved you, cherished you?—were we not infants together—have not our joys and sorrows been the same? Have I ever wronged you in thought? and how has Henry done so?—has he not confided in you, trusted you with all his people—given himself and them into your hands, and do you repay him with treachery and murder? Turn not from me—you must hear me: never, never will I quit

you till you grant me their lives, or, if you refuse it, here on this spot I will remain to be the first victim; and know, Charles, the blood you thus shed of your nearest and dearest will rise against you, and make your future life a scene of perpetual horror. Phantoms will flit around your bed — spirits of vengeance will shriek in your ears, as do my accents now, and you will die in tortures, without hope of mercy!"

"Hold, frantic woman!" cried the King, starting up and bursting from the hold of Catherine; "distract me not with these denunciations. Navarre, Condé, fly to your chambers — avoid my sight, lest I repent: you are safe. Nançay, take heed the princes are unharmed; set guards upon them, but let their lives be sacred as my own. The rest," he hurriedly continued, "the rest shall fall — yes, by my own hand! Fear not, mother; your counsel shall be followed. My aim shall be sure; the enemies of God shall flee before me!"

So saying, he grasped the instrument of destruction which he held, rushed to the open window, and fired, crying out with the gestures of a maniac, as he reloaded his gun, "Kill! kill! down with the enemies of God!"

CHAPTER XIX.

LES MATINES DE PARIS.

"There lay Duncan,
His silver skin laced with his golden blood!" — SHAKSPEARE.

During this period Montgomery, disguised as a Cordelier, on quitting the Prévôt Nantouillet, hurried along the quay, and, taking a boat, passed the river. The boatman, he observed, made a sign to him as they parted, which he did not understand, and he felt somewhat uneasy in perceiving that he looked after him with a glance of very sinister expression as he stepped out of the boat, and he saw him whispering to some of his comrades, but heard not their words.

The Rue de Bethizy, where the Admiral resided, was not so soon gained as he had hoped, for he found the streets crowded with soldiers, and met groups of men of the lowest classes, who seemed parading up and down in riotous confusion, unrepressed by any authority. He contrived to push through the crowd, and had nearly arrived at the door he sought, when some men with torches rushed along, and he was obliged to stand up and let them pass; but as he did so, the light, flashing upon his face, discovered him distinctly to those who were advancing.

"Ha! the Huguenot Cordelier, by Notre Dame!" cried a voice close to him; and looking up, he saw his assailant on a late occasion, Crucé, the butcher of the faubourg St. Jacques. He was accompanied by men in a variety of costume, evidently foreign; but their leader's countenance he required but one glance to recognise as that of Captain Florio: the recollection of the Italian appeared to be quite as quick, to judge by the exclamation of surprise which he made. Crucé bounded forward, and would have seized the monk, had not the latter at the same instant caught a torch from the hand of the foremost, which he thrust full in the face of the butcher. A loud laugh from some, and exclamations from several of the party, echoed along the street, and attracted the notice of a group of students who were passing. Always ready for a fray, they hurried to the scene of action, and found their old acquaintance the Cordelier struggling with the infuriate Crucé, who, enraged at the laughter of his companions, and half blinded by the flame, was rendered perfectly furious. The monk, however, was a man nearly as tall, and apparently as powerful as his enemy, and dealt blows in all directions, as he stood with his back against a door, and kept his assailants at bay.

"Give way!" cried the student Belcastel, rushing forward, followed by his friends. "Come on, comrades; we owe this monk some reparation, and though he is a Cordelier, we will not see him overpowered by numbers. St. Germain! St. Germain! to the rescue!"

So saying, they commenced a vigorous assault on the torchbearers, and cries and blows resounded on all sides. Florio meantime had approached the monk, and as his

arm was raised to keep off one of the mob, slid close to him, and suddenly drawing a dagger from his vest stabbed him in the shoulder. The steel must have entered his side, but that Belcastel's hand interposing, prevented the stroke taking effect.

"Fly! you are wounded," cried Belcastel; "leave us to deal with these ruffians: we are many, and you will only lose your life if you stay."

As he spoke, a patrol of several soldiers had arrived at the spot, and one amongst them, who, by his dress, appeared to belong to the Court, called out in an authoritative tone, —

"Fools! disperse instantly, — have you forgotten my orders? — the hour has not struck, you will spoil all. Young gentlemen," he added, turning to the students, "what means this licence? why do you attack peaceful citizens in the streets? will you always be causing disturbances by your turbulence? Soldiers make them your prisoners!"

"We will see that!" exclaimed Belcastel; "fly, my friends, we can show them it is not so easy to catch as to command."

The crowd which had gathered round during this tumult gave way instantly, to afford a passage for their favourites, who, though prone to create disturbances, were, nevertheless, generous, and their spirit and courage made them generally liked. Several of the people cried out as they barred the passage of the soldiers, "Down with the Italians; — what do we want with Italians? — who made the Queen's poisoner a general? — It is René Bianco who drugged the Queen of Navarre! — Long live King Charles — Confusion to Catherine!" and amidst similar shouts and derisive epithets, René continued his way to the palace, while the active students contrived to elude their pursuers, and the Cordelier, taking advantage of the confusion, hastened on, and soon found himself before the gate of the Admiral's abode.

There he found himself in the midst of contention once more. Several men, who were carrying suits of armour and swords into the hall of the house, were arrested by

Cosseins, the captain of the guard, placed there by the King, as a supposed protection against any attempt from the Guises. He insisted that no one should enter, and that his orders were strict to prevent it. The Sieur de Guerchy, who accompanied the armour-bearers, passionately contended for admission, and some of his people proceeded to endeavour to force their entrance; the Cordelier joining them, sought an opportunity of slipping in unobserved; but his habit appeared to give offence to those who knew him not as a friend, and he was repulsed by them. At this time Teligni came forth from the house, and in his usual gentle and calm manner requested that all parties would refrain from violence, for that the Admiral, who was much recovered, was sleeping, and the noise might do him injury.

At his soft and persuasive voice the tumult ceased, for Teligni was so much adored by his own people, and so respected by the Catholics, that he was always listened to with attention.

"I am returning," said he, "to my own house close by — should the Admiral ask for me let me instantly be informed." He spoke to Labonne, the first valet of the Admiral, who had attended him to the door. The monk made an attempt to approach Teligni, but was rudely thrust back by those who were near. Almost despairing of his purpose, he now addressed himself to Labonne, who, recognising him as having before visited his master, called to Cosseins to allow him to enter, who offered no opposition, imagining that he admitted one of his own party, who, he thought, might be useful in the interior of the mansion.

At length, then, the Cordelier found himself within the walls; but the attendants refused to admit him to Coligni, who was asleep. "Is the Vidame de Chartres still here?" asked the monk.

"He left but half an hour ago," was the reply.

"My friends," said the Cordelier, "I come to warn him, you, and all of danger — fearful, dreadful danger; the night wears on, and scarcely an hour is between you and your fate. Do not disbelieve my word. I am your

friend, and the friend of the Admiral; let him be placed in a litter, and conveyed away to any obscure part of the town — let him cross the river, and before the gates are closed he may yet escape."

"Madness!" exclaimed Paré the surgeon, who was near; "he is unable to bear it; and why should you doubt the King's protection? His guards and those of Navarre surround us. I am sent here by his Grace expressly to attend to the patient. There is no danger. We are aware of the intentions of De Guise, and are prepared to meet any attack."

"Oh, my good father!" said the sieur de Bouchavannes, "we are in no fear; so long as there are no traitors in the house, the Admiral is safe."

He said this with a suspicious glance at the Cordelier, which was not long in being understood by those round. Several daggers were drawn from the girdles of the bystanders, and imprecations uttered against any who would seek to betray their master.

"O God!" said the monk, "will nothing persuade you — and will you remain to be a sacrifice? — Hear me, infatuated men! I came through dangers and difficulties innumerable, to warn you while there might be yet time. A plot is on foot to massacre all the Huguenots in Paris; at a given signal every man is to rise against his neighbour, and a general carnage must ensue."

"And why do you, a Catholic, wish to save us? what cause has a Cordelier to be the friend of the Protestants?" asked Bouchavannes.

"I am not what I seem," cried the monk, throwing back his cowl; "my life may be the forfeit of the discovery; but there is no other means of convincing you. You, Jolet, faithful servant of the Admiral, cannot but remember me. Alas! was it not you who handed me the fatal spear on that unlucky day which has caused all my misfortunes and those of France?"

Jolet, the confidential attendant, with Labonne, on Coligni, pressed forward as he heard these words, and with a loud cry threw himself at the feet of the monk, exclaiming, —

"De Montgomery! is it possible? Oh, my lord,—my dear lord! do I behold you again?"

A general astonishment took possession of all. Montgomery, anxious that no time should be lost, entreated that precautions might be taken in case of any attempt at surprise, and informed them that his intention now was to hasten back to the faubourg St. Germain in hopes to be able to give warning to others of the Huguenot chiefs who resided in that quarter.

He accordingly descended the stairs, proposing to make his way to the river as speedily as possible, but was stopped as he attempted to cross the court by the Swiss guard, who proclaimed to him that their orders were to allow no one either to go out or in during the remainder of the night; that it was now nearly midnight, and at daybreak every one would be at liberty.

"There is nothing for us but patience," said M. de Bouchavannes: "meanwhile, we may as well go to rest. There can be no danger with such vigilant guards as surround us."

At this moment the bell of the invalid rang, and his attendants hastened to him. Montgomery, though unwilling to agitate him, thought it better that he should be prepared in case of any tumult, and desired to be announced. He found him in bed, but considerably better, although unable to use his arm. He communicated to him what he had heard from the Prévôt; but the Admiral refused to give credit to the idea of the King's being privy to the plot, as indeed Montgomery himself was far from believing. He, however, rose, and covering himself with a nightgown, summoned Merlin the Protestant minister to read prayers in his room, in which act of devotion Montgomery joined.

With fervour and pious earnestness the good Admiral returned thanks to God for his late preservation, and offered up prayers for the good of France, and the cause of the reformed religion, supplicating that those of the opposite belief might be led into the right way, and entreating pardon for all his enemies.

He had just finished his devotional exercise when a

knocking was heard without, and he ordered Labonne to inquire its meaning. He soon returned, explaining that it was a messenger from the King, who desired instant admission to the Admiral.

"Lose no time, Labonne," said Coligni; "take the keys and give him admittance."

Labonne descended, and having placed the key in the lock, turned it with difficulty, for there seemed a pressure on the outside. "Stand away," said he; "I cannot open the door if you press against it thus."

He turned the key, the door flew wide open, and in an instant the dagger of Cosseins was buried in his heart.

In rushed the assailants with frightful cries, led by René Bianco. They darted forward as he, who seemed to have the direction of the party, exclaimed,—

"I will guide you!—this way—this way to the apartments of the Admiral!"

On hearing the confusion without, the Swiss guards of the King of Navarre, who were posted within, as they were to be included in the intended massacre, closed the iron gate which led to the inner court; but Captain Cossein, bringing up his men, ordered them to fire through, which they did instantly, and two out of the five were killed. Cornaton, who, though deputed by the King, was not aware of the meditated treachery, commanded his people to pile coffers and chests, and all the heavy furniture they could find, against the inner door.

While they were thus engaged, Cossein, who had succeeded in forcing the iron gate, and had killed the rest of the guard, clamoured for admittance, proclaiming that he acted by the King's command; but Cornaton answered,—

"I was set here as a guard, not as an assassin," and refused to obey.

A furious attack was now made by those outside, and the barricade proved too weak to resist. With a terrific crash the door gave way, and the troop rushed into the body of the house.

The noise of all this affray rose to the Admiral's ears, and he felt that his last hour was come. Merlin darted to the door, and saw the servants flying in all directions. He

returned to his master, exclaiming, "God summons us to himself?"

Montgomery was unarmed: he looked at his friend in agony, and saw no change in his face,—the same calm look of resignation, the same benevolent smile.

"It is all over with me," he said. "Fly, my friend, and save a life precious to our cause. Endeavour to warn our chiefs: they will not neglect your warning as I did: but it was too late. This deed has been long resolved on. The murderers are at hand. Farewell!"

"No," cried Montgomery: "I may yet defend you; this garb may be some protection. Are there no arms—nothing for resistance?"

As he spoke, he seized a small sword, which was the only defensive weapon in the chamber, and which was merely a slight ornamental one; this he concealed beneath his robe, and awaited the arrival of the murderers, who came on with furious shouts.

A peal of fire-arms told that the faithful servants of the Admiral were falling in every direction. "Fly, Merlin!" I insist: "Montgomery, fly!" cried the Admiral.

Panic-striken, and feeling that their lives must be sacrificed if they remained, all fled from the chamber by a concealed door which led to a tower, and to the upper part of the house, and Montgomery remained with the devoted Coligni alone.

The murderers by this time had reached the door of the Admiral's sleeping apartment, where their thundering strokes were heard mingled with commands that it should be opened.

The stillness of death was within: there sat the wounded chief of a hundred battles, weak and faint, and unable to lift the arm which had so many times wielded a sword terrible to his enemies: beside him the gallant Montgomery, once the most accomplished cavalier of his time, the hero of his party, the beloved of the fair,—with no weapon but a sword, which was only made to figure by the side of a carpet knight, having no means besides of defence, with the certainty of beholding his friend's death, and anticipating his own. He had in the

hurry of the instant barricaded the door with every article of weight he could find in the room, — had dragged the table and a large coffer towards it, but he was aware that he could thus gain but little delay; the repeated blows told him that the door could not long resist, and in effect it gave way, and the white, green, and black uniforms of the Duke of Anjou's Swiss guards gleamed in the torch light.

There were a few steps leading up to the chamber, and by main force Montgomery contrived to hurl down the foremost of the ruffians, who was no other than Bianco: he fell on his companions, and was for a moment stunned. The others rushed on, headed by a German named Besme, who in his jargon called aloud for the Admiral. Attin, a domestic of the Duke d'Aumale, pressed in next with his drawn sword, and made a rush at the Admiral.

"Hold, miscreants!" cried Montgomery: "respect his grey hairs. Cowards, he is unarmed!"

Attin drew back with a shudder as he gazed on the Cordelier. "'Tis St. Francis himself!" he exclaimed.

"Fool!" roared Besme; "down with the Huguenot! What is the meddling priest to us!" Then, advancing towards Coligni, while Montgomery struggled with him in vain, he called out, "Are you the Admiral?"

"I am," said Coligni with a calm accent. "You ought to respect my age and infirmity; but it is but shortening my life a little more — that is all!"

Cosseins at this juncture darted into the room. "The Duke de Guise is impatient below," cried he. "Is not the deed done yet?"

It was enough. Besme gave one spring and buried his steel in the Admiral's body.

"Thank God, a Frenchman dealt not that blow!" cried Montgomery.

With a violent effort he threw off Attin, and as he did so, the grasp of René held him hard. With the handle of his broken sword he struck at him, and as he was exclaiming, "Kill the disguised Huguenot! — Kill the traitor Montgomery!" once more felled him to the ground, and leaping over his prostrate body, darted through the

tapestried door up the tower steps, and found himself in a long corridor at the top of the house. Onward he flew, following the way the other fugitives had taken, and reaching a small window, contrived to force himself through it. As he did so a heavy beam fell close to the spot he had quitted, and nearly blocked up the passage behind him. Feeling that by this accident his pursuers would find some difficulty in following him, he continued his perilous way, for he was now on the roof of a house which shelved in a fearful manner towards the street. By sliding down the side of a chimney he reached a lower flat roof, and paused a moment, when he heard yells and shouts below, around, behind him. Which way to fly he knew not — to advance or to retreat appeared equally fraught with danger; yet to remain where he was, was impossible.

A shot sent after him struck the chimney near which he leant; and nerved by despair he made a leap onwards. He had scarcely observed where he was directing his attempts, and when he lighted on his knees he looked round with horror: between him and the spot on which he last stood was a fearful chasm, deep, dark, and jagged with the projecting fronts of houses and roofs, — the division, in fact, of two narrow streets. Across this ravine he had leapt, and found himself now clinging to the slippery roof of a house much lower than that he had just quitted in so unpremeditated a manner. He scrambled up, breathless and faint, and staggered on, for a glance showed him that his pursuers had paused at the opening which they could not attempt to pass, and he thought a few more efforts might ensure his safety. Their bullets still rattled on the slates, and rebounded from the chimneys; but so rapid were his movements that they failed to reach him.

Before him was a high pile of buildings; if he could gain that he would be lost to view. He advanced crawling on his hands and knees: he felt that he was covered with blood from the wound in his shoulder, and the blows he had received from Attin. Blinded and exhausted, he made one desperate struggle, one spring, and fell senseless down a yawning gulf which seemed open to receive him.

CHAPTER XX.

BROTHERLY LOVE.

"Oh that it were to do!—what have we done?"—SHAKSPEARE.

CLAUDE, and his companion in captivity, remained for several hours in their unavoidable solitude, tortured with agonising fears, and hearing around them the din of fire-arms, the tolling of bells, the shrieks and groans of the victims, and the vociferations of their assailants. Claude sought by every means to look upon that which chilled his heart with horror, vainly hoping to see some succour arrive to the unfortunate Huguenots. He stood chained, as it were, to the casement which had revealed to him the frightful scene beneath, and gazing with an eagerness which might have exposed him to observation, but for the heavy stone ornaments which partially concealed his figure from those without; while the thick drapery within, nearly torn down in his agonised attempts to force the door close to him, shut him almost from the sight of those within the room. He had cause to congratulate himself on the latter circumstance; for he presently heard a key turn in the lock of the antechamber, and he had only time to shrink still more closely to the wall, when a figure advanced into the room where he was, covered with a long, dark cloak, which cautiously approached the spot where Mabille lay, still nearly in a state of insensibility.

This was a man of tall stature, somewhat bent, but not by age; for Claude perceived when he stooped and dropped the mantle from his shoulders that he was not more than two or three and twenty. His head was considerably inclined on one side; and this well-known peculiarity, joined to a certain dignity in his air, induced Claude to imagine that he had seen him before; and the full view he caught of his features, discovering an aquiline nose, pallid cheeks, and eyes, whose remarkably fierce expression was rather softened at the instant, and which were of

a clear hazel, inclining to yellow, whether from constitution or temporary agitation of mind, convinced Claude that it was Charles IX. who stood before him.

"Mabille," he said in a low voice, "are you safe?"

She raised her head at the words, and gazing with a look of wildness and astonishment, met his glance. She started up, and catching him in her arms, exclaimed, —

"My child! — my son! are you then spared to me — to France? What meant the tumult of last night? — what mean the frightful sounds which yet ring in my ears? — how have you escaped the traitorous Guises? Oh! when will you be warned against those bitter enemies? — when will you believe in, and beware of, their wicked designs?"

Charles returned her caresses with much affection, but smiled as he answered, — "You are deceived, Mabille, my dear nurse, the Guises are my good friends: they have this night done me good service. Coligni — the traitor Coligni — lies pierced with a thousand wounds beneath my chamber window. All my foes will be exterminated, — the accursed Huguenots are slaughtered like sheep in the streets of Paris; but I would not give up my nurse, — the only creature who loves me in the world, — though my mother would have sacrificed you with the rest."

"What import have these appalling words?" said the nurse, shuddering. "Can my ears have heard aright, that murderers, licensed by an inhuman king, have dared to lay hands on his innocent subjects?"

"The devoted people," answered Charles, sternly, "are swept from my land, too long polluted by their impiety, and treason is at an end. I trust in God none have escaped. It is cruel to show clemency towards them, — it is clemency to be cruel."

A cold tremour crept over Claude as he listened. He held his breath, and stood without allowing himself the slightest motion, as he rightly judged that Mabille was the only object of the King's mercy, and his discovery and death would probably have taken place at the same time.

The nurse looked on Charles with a fixed and severe countenance.

"Why, then, did you save me, barbarous Prince?" said she: "what is my worthless life, when the servants of God are slaughtered by the unrighteous? A curse will fall on the heads of all concerned in this deed: they shall perish from the land, and their inheritance shall pass away. 'Whoso slayeth by the sword shall perish by the sword!' they shall be tormented in this life with remorse, and every worldly evil shall overtake them, and they shall die in the agonies of despair, without hope in the eternal mercy of the Lord!'"

"Say not so, woman, — say not so!" interrupted Charles, trembling: "they are a sacrifice for the nation's good, — they are justly punished for rebellion and wickedness."

"They are murdered!" exclaimed Mabille, looking undauntedly at him; "and their murderers are accursed!"

"Nurse," said Charles, his lip quivering as he spoke, "reproach me not, I cannot bear it! My mind is confused — distracted! and I can little endure harshness from you, above all, whom, against my conscience, I have saved! Irritate me not, lest I forget the affection which induced me to preserve you! Follow me instantly and be silent! None shall molest you; but beware of urging me too far."

Mabille followed the King into his closet, where, having thrown himself into a seat, he desired her to remain in attendance upon him.

"I am," said he, "very uneasy. The agitation of last night has so much excited my spirits, that I fear I shall suffer in consequence: but first, I had forgotten your long fast. We have made you a good Catholic in spite of yourself. Eat, good Mabille, and recover your looks. Nay, do not attempt to refuse; you are as pale as fear, and I must have merry faces round me — now!"

As he pronounced the last word, his voice faltered, and he turned away, making a signal for Mabille to approach a table on which was placed refreshments.

She obeyed, and though almost choked with tears, endeavoured to swallow some necessary nourishment, thinking meanwhile on the situation of Claude, and on

the means of relieving him, which appeared difficult, considering the commands she had received from the King to stay where she was.

Charles remained for some time silent and lost in thought; nor was he roused from his reverie till a page entered announcing the approach of the Queen-mother. The King started from his seat.

"How!" cried he, "said I not that I would be alone?"

"Her Grace commanded me to announce her entrance," faltered the page. Charles impatiently motioned him to withdraw, and taking Mabille's hand, led her to an adjoining chamber.

"Stay here," said he, "till my mother has departed." So saying, he left her, and she became an involuntary witness of the interview which followed.

"I behold you, my son," said Catherine, "after our victory, and I come to offre you my congratulations. Henceforth we may lay down our heads in peace, confident in our own safety, and in having performed a duty to God."

Charles muttered a reply which was scarcely audible; his artful mother instantly perceived the vacillating state of his mind, and hastened to add:

"You, my son, deserve the thanks of all good Catholics, for the part you have taken in this glorious sacrifice; they tell me your aim was unerring as you marked from your window the flying wretches who were delivered into our hands. It was truly a sublime sight to behold the ungodly scattered like autumn leaves before the whirlwind of Heaven's wrath."

"It was! it was!" almost shrieked Charles, a livid hue overspreading his face, as he raised his clenched hands, "and Heaven knows my zeal in its cause. I fired long and steadily; though my carbine could not always reach the villains, yet I did execution. I saw them butchered round me by my faithful Swiss. I saw them sink in the waters of the Seine, whose tide was all of blood, — I heard their shrieks louder than the cannon — their starting eyes, as they looked up vainly for mercy, were brighter than the torches' flame — hundreds and

hundreds I saw fall, for they were brought to my gates to be offered up — here! here — even in my very chambers they were pierced by the daggers of the righteous. It was a great, an immortal deed! Yet," he continued wildly, pacing the room, and casting his arms above his head, "where is my reward, mother? What prize has Heaven in store for me? When will come my hour of content, of happiness? I have had my desire upon my enemies; I have done — you say I have done well; but I tell you, mother, there is distraction in my brain; remorse — remorse, and worse than death in my soul!"

The wretched Prince cast himself upon a seat, and covered his face with his hands; Catherine's pale brow grew dark as she said:

"Our act is holy: has not Heaven manifested its approval by signs and wonders? A dead and withered thorn in which there was no sap left, and which had been condemned to be rooted up in the cemetery of the Innocents, this morning has sent out blossoms which perfume the whole air, and continue to spring forth in the very sight of men, amazing all beholders."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Charles, listening eagerly. "I will visit it; I will myself see this prodigy!"

"Yes, my son," continued Catherine, "and to Montfaucon we will go together, where our arch enemy is now suspended by the heels, like an unclean animal, for the diversion of our loyal people."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Charles, "is it so? — it must be a curious spectacle. We will take Navarre and Condé to this pastime; how they will delight in it! Old Coligni — I promised he should have justice; he has it now!"

Catherine perceived that the mirth of the King was far from real, and dreading that he should relapse into regret, went on quickly.

"Yes, Heaven has delivered them all an easy prey; the work still goes on, and thousands more will fall. Men shall see the divine will accomplished, and tremble at divine judgment. We are chosen as ministers, and shall we dare to repine and repent, when we should rejoice that all is accomplished! Be but yourself, my son, and let no

idle, human weakness conquer your zeal for Heaven's good."

"You say well, madam," said the King; "all our vows are fulfilled, and one of your nearest and dearest wishes is but now accomplished. You will hear with delight, I know," he added sneeringly, "that your long-desired project for my brother Anjou has succeeded. My despatches of this day inform me that the Poles have elected him for their ving, and are impatient to hail the arrival, in their delightful country, of their new sovereign. You hear the tidings with joy as I expected," he continued, smiling bitterly, for Catherine, overcome by the unexpected communication of an event which she dreaded,—though forced by policy not only to affect approval, but required to exert her interest to bring about,—sank back into her chair, her countenance suddenly changing.

"Alas! is it possible!" exclaimed she, quite off her guard.

"What more probable, madam?" said Charles; "did you not desire it ardently? Did not both you and he entreat me to further your views in that quarter? You praise my zeal in some cases, do so now, I beg,—yes,—I rejoice to say, and I am sincere in my joy, that my efforts have been successful."

Catherine's eyes filled with tears, an unusual occurrence with her.

"He must leave us then," said she; "we shall lose the brightest ornament of our Court."

"I feign no sorrow, madam," returned her son; "when Anjou is gone I shall perhaps have less reason to regret my mother's want of regard towards her eldest son. See, where the King of Poland comes to hear from your own lips the news of his elevation."

As he spoke, the Duke of Anjou entered; he paid his devoirs respectfully to his brother, who made no return to his salutation. Catherine hastened to meet and embrace him, exclaiming as she did so,—"Dearest Henry, let me be the first to hail you as a king,—the King of Poland. The object of our wishes is gained, thanks to the anxious care of King Charles: let your first act be to pay him homage for your kingdom."

Notwithstanding the significant glances which she bestowed on her favourite son, and her secret pressure of his hand as a warning to him to restrain the feelings of vexation which she was well aware that this unwelcome intelligence would create, Anjou, unable to curb his impetuosity, cried out—

"My sentence of banishment is then pronounced: I am to be outlawed amongst savages, and debarred from civilised communication!"

"Henry," said the Queen, "what means this ingratitude,—this sudden change in your opinions?"

"No, madam," he replied fiercely, "there is no change: you well know my aversion to this appointment; my brother knows it also; and it is but mockery to announce it as though it were news I should hear with pleasure."

"I see plainly," said Charles, sarcastically, "that mother and son must depart together; your hearts are so united, that it were cruelty to divide them: but know, both of you, that I have long seen through the slight veil which is now thrown partially aside, and which, I am aware, conceals designs deep and dangerous. I know your lukewarm wishes, your pretended anxiety to obtain, but real wish to avoid, the crown of Poland,—which gained, the actors in various intrigues would be too widely separated. I tell you that these schemes have not deceived me. I, however, acted with more truth, and what I ordered was done with all my heart: my ambassadors have exerted all their influence and eloquence, have represented my brother as just, wise, merciful, and prudent, and they have succeeded. The kingdom of Poland is yours, with subjects ready to obey and idolize you,—almost as much," he said with a sneer, "as you are adored in France. For myself,—last night disposed of many of my enemies; to-day I have the prospect of losing another."

"My son," interposed the Queen-mother, who began to fear the consequences of the anger of Charles, whose spirit and quickness surprised and alarmed her, "what do I hear? Can you consider your brother Anjou as an enemy?—say rather you meant that childish Alençon,

who wept to see your enemies fall,—while Henry has proved his zeal and fidelity to the utmost. Who more earnestly advised the present salutary measure than he? Who more desires the extermination of your foes? Let me behold your friends—let me see your brothers—nor cloud the joy of this moment with idle dissensions."

"Talk not of joy, madam," cried Charles, starting up furiously,—"talk of despair, of horror, of cruel treachery! This deed of ours can bring no joy. Well might Alençon weep!—why did not I, when Marguerite lay groaning at my feet,—when Navarre and Condé begged for mercy,—when Coligni—— Oh, God! my brain is on fire when I reflect on it! What am I but a murderer?—a cold, calculating, miserable wretch, acted upon by others, and abandoned to eternal infamy by an act at which the princes of Europe will shudder,—from which the world will recoil. The blood that now rushes through every vein of my body is burning with the fever of remorse! You counselled, you urged me to the commission of a crime so deadly, that every hour of my future existence will be embittered by the hideous vision of it—and you dare to talk to me of joy!"

"Your Grace felt, methinks, but little remorse or pity," said Anjou, scornfully, "when you marked the Huguenotaille from the window of the gallery, and your sure aim proved how little their cries could make your nerves unsteady!"

"Silence—forbear!" cried Catherine, sternly; "the King is ill,—is weak,—and events have so crowded upon him that he is not himself. He will not long permit this idle compassion for undeserving rebels to disturb his quiet and unsettle his temper thus."

"Yes," muttered Charles, recovering himself, while a new expression spread itself over his features,—"yes, they were rebels and traitors, and their fate was merited. Let no one blame me for their punishment."

"None will,—none can, my son," replied Catherine: "they would have overturned the state, destroyed our holy faith, and sacrificed us and our people. Raise not phantoms to harass your mind. Does the judge reproach

himself for having pronounced sentence on the criminal? No more, my dearest Charles,—calm yourself, and chase away these visions. I will send you a draught to soothe and comfort you, which Bianco shall prepare."

Catherine had tenderly approached him as she spoke, and was supporting his head on her shoulder; but as she pronounced the name of Bianco, the King wildly exclaimed,—"Name him not—his drugs are fatal! they have already proved their potency too well. His zeal, too, is misdirected; he has killed my clockmaker, a man of great value to me, and allowed his shop to be pillaged: it is a cruel loss, which I shall be long in replacing. Madam, I request,—nay, I insist on that man's removal—his sight is noxious to me: he shall not be suffered about the court. I had purposed ordering his absence, and you remind me of it in good time."

Catherine replied haughtily, "Does your Grace intend regulating my household in future? Am I not to be a free agent even in what concerns my private affairs? This is, methinks, somewhat too much of disrespect towards your mother and a princess. I take my leave of your Grace, and trust that when perfectly restored to health you will be less unreasonable, and less disposed to offer insult where honour is due."

So saying, the Queen-mother rose, and, accompanied by the new king of Poland, quitted the presence of Charles.

She despatched immediately to him his Jesuit confessor, Edmond Auger, rightly judging that he would be the most proper person to allay the irritation of the King's mind by his arguments and sophistry. Accordingly the utmost eloquence and cunning were brought into action against the scruples which conscience and reason suggested, and so well did the Jesuit succeed, that the mind of Charles became gradually calmer, and when Auger took his leave the King returned to the closet where he had placed Mabille, and desired her to return to her own apartments, to send to him his physician Ambroise Paré, and to hold herself in readiness to remain with him during the night.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RESPITE.

" I would 'twere but a dream — then there were hope
I might be once awake — and so see day.
But night is lodg'd within me, night perpetual,
Darker than the Cimmerian ! " — HEYWOOD.

It became evident to Mabille that there was no safety for Claude but in his concealment, and on her return she communicated to him what had passed in the King's chamber.

" Your life," said she, " has been saved only through an accidental visit to me, for the warning I received is now too well explained, though it probably pointed to no one particular person. For Alix I trust we need not entertain apprehension : her father is known as a bigoted Papist, and her secret profession is unsuspected."

" But," interrupted Claude, " may I not attempt to discover the truth ? Of what use is my wretched life if I may not risk it for her sake !"

" Be patient," returned Mabille ; " there will be risk enough hereafter. No one could quit the walls of the Louvre at present but with a prospect of certain death. The rest of this fearful night I am to remain with the King. I will use all my endeavours to make him revoke his cruel sentence, to induce him to stay the fury of these wretches to whom the Protestants are given up as a prey ; and with the blessing of Heaven I shall succeed. Remain, therefore, for a few more hours here, and I trust to bring you tidings of enlargement."

However unwilling Claude was to agree to this, he felt that there was no remedy, and consented to submit, acknowledging the justice of Mabille's reasoning. She procured for him some necessary refreshment, and entreating him to be cautious and patient led him to the most retired part of her suite of apartments, which he readily promised to secure within from all intrusion, and then, after bidding her adieu, he threw himself on a bed, and, exhausted with watching and distress of mind, was soon buried in sleep.

Far otherwise was it with Charles : he lay in agonies of body and mind, which no remedies appeared to relieve.

He started at the slightest sound, and turned his wandering eyes constantly in quest of Mabille, fearing to lose sight of her for an instant.

As the night advanced he became still more restless and uneasy; and when the bell tolled two, his agitation grew to an alarming height: he gasped for breath; his features were distorted with fear; he clung to Mabille in uncontrolled terror and exclaimed —

"They are there! The ghastly shadows flit all around me! I cannot keep them from my sight! What seas of blood are before me! Where are you, Mabille? My dear and only friend, do not desert me! do not quit me! I saved you; pray for mercy on my soul! I followed a dreadful counsel — was worked upon, — urged, — forced to consent. My mother, she it was whose artful representations and threats forced me to this act. Is there any hope of pardon for a wretch like me?"

"My dear child," said the nurse, tenderly, "despair not, nor weep so bitterly; it rends my heart to see you thus; be assured that there is store of mercy for sinners who repent. On those who counselled this deed will the judgment of Heaven fall. Fear not, my son; the King of all the world is all-forgiving, and will not disdain your penitence. For me, who owe my life to your clemency, I am bound to pray, and will ever pray for your pardon and consolation, though the crime be indeed deadly which you have been led to commit."

"I could have saved others, and I allowed all to be sacrificed!" sobbed the unfortunate young man. "Poor La Rochefoucauld! We had played together till near midnight. I bade him beware, as I should rouse him in the night to take my revenge for his success. He left me with a jest, and they murdered him in my name! Poor La Rochefoucauld! so cheerful, so merry! Oh God! stabbed with a thousand wounds!—and Teligny, the mildest, gentlest, most confiding of human creatures, to the last asserted my innocence of the massacre! Oh that my list were not all of murders!"

He sank back on his pillow.

"Sire," said Mabille, "take comfort; Ambroise Paré, you know, is saved, and ready to serve you still; and

doubtless many others. One I can name whose prayers will join with mine for his deliverer."

"How, Mabille?" said the King, a ray of pleasure brightening his pallid cheek: "whom do you mean? But perchance it is to Navarre that you allude. My sister's tears saved him, even when I was mad with the fury of slaughter. Oh God! they must have used some sorcery to make me what I am. Bianco has wondrous power, and may have given me potions!"

"Thank Heaven!" cried Mabille, falling on her knees and not heeding his last remark, "Henry, then, yet lives!"

"Yes," said Charles; "and Condé. But tell me, nurse, of whom then spoke you but now?"

"If your Grace will promise that he shall be in safety, I will disclose the secret," answered she.

"Doubt me not!" exclaimed the King, half rising. "You take a load from off my heart. I would not cause another death to purchase half the universe!"

Mabille then, happy to afford relief to his distracted mind, and aware of the ascendency which she possessed over him, ventured to relate the circumstances of Claude's escape through the means which Charles himself had used for her preservation. As she recounted the particulars he became more calm; sometimes he smiled at her dilemma, and by degrees his mood grew happier.

She now thought it a favourable moment to ask if he had given orders respecting the continuance of the persecutions, pleading so earnestly and eloquently, that Charles, entirely overcome, summoned some of his officers, and, with the promptitude and rapidity which characterised him, issued his commands that the massacre should forthwith cease; that strict injunctions should be laid on the Huguenots to keep close in their houses till the excitement was over, and that any infringement of these positive commands should be punished severely.

Having done this, and dismissed his astonished servants, he returned to his couch, and desiring Mabille to keep her friend concealed till she had his permission to liberate him, soon after fell into a profound sleep, while she watched by him with all the patience of affection.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

THE HAYLOFT AND THE STAKE.

"By day's approach look to be visited."— SHAKSPEARE.

When Montgomery returned to consciousness from a long insensibility, after his perilous flight, he found himself in partial darkness. After turning and struggling a little he began to be aware that the last desperate effort he had made to avoid his pursuers, had precipitated him through a half-opened door in the roof of a hayloft, into the midst of a stack of hay, and the violence of his fall having loosened some of it from above, it had detached itself, and entirely enveloped him. He felt a sensation of stifling, and cast his arms about to extricate himself, by which means he threw off some of the hay that covered him, and rising, was rejoiced to find that his long and unpremeditated repose had greatly refreshed and invigorated him.

He descended from his exalted position with some difficulty, and groping about came to a rude flight of stairs, down which he ventured, and alighted in an out-house leading to a stable. Here he paused and looked round considering what was best to be done. His Cordelier's robe was torn, and much stained with blood, and he feared to present himself again in the streets where he might be recognised in consequence; but how to procure another disguise he knew not. While he hesitated on the steps he should take, he heard voices approaching, and hastily concealing himself he saw two men enter the stable, one of whom he recognised as Blampignon, the neighbour of his host of the Rue St. Jacques, Mathurin Lussaut, and the other as the host of le Bel Image.

"I was as close," said the vain little torchmaker, "to

the miraculous thorn as I am to you, and I should have managed to pluck a flower but that one of the holy Fathers pushed me away; I hope it isn't a sin, but I vow they seemed to me to be stuck on with wax, and to be only made of paper, but there were so many priests round that no one but I got near enough to see."

"I don't believe anything about the miracle," returned his companion; "the Saints and the Blessed Virgin" (crossing himself) "would never approve of such wickedness as the murder of the good old Admiral and young Teligni, the sweetest and mildest-spoken cavalier in France."

"But they say," said Blampignon, "that the King ordered it all."

"No such thing, man," replied the other, "that can't be; for an order is just issued — the crier has been calling it at the end of our street — that the massacre is not to go on, that the King takes the Huguenots under his protection, and they have only to keep in their houses to be safe."

Hearing this, and reassured by the evident compassion felt by his hearers, Montgomery ventured to show himself, much to the terror of Blampignon, who, uttering an exclamation of fear, climbed up into a manger, and there looked down upon him in great alarm and consternation.

"Good man!" he exclaimed, "it wasn't I who spoke against the Guises, and I meant no harm about the King's Grace's Majesty ——"

"Be not alarmed," said Montgomery; "I am no friend to either, but a fugitive from their cruelty. I throw myself on your protection, and entreat your assistance."

"You shall have it," replied Blampignon pompously, scrambling down, while his friend advancing towards the Count, assured him he was quite safe, and they would render him any service in their power.

"I have no means of rewarding you now," said Montgomery, "for I am destitute of every thing; but I will take care hereafter that you shall not lose by your generosity."

"Why, as I live," said Blampignon, peering in his face, "it is our Cordelier who lodges with Lussaut."

"True, my friend," replied the Count; "but my habit is torn and stained; can you procure me a disguise in which I may be less likely to be known."

"Here is a carter's frock and cap," said the host, "to which you are welcome; but we must put a white cross on it, otherwise you might not even now be safe."

"I will protect you as far as our way lies together," said the torchmaker; "I am bound to the Grève, where I have a load of torches to deliver for the firing of the great stake. Oh! it will be a grand sight; you had better stay and see it. The King is to set the first torch; such a fine one, the handle all over white fleurs de lis—quite a picture."

Montgomery declining this offer made ready to accompany him; and they set out together, but soon separated, as the neighbourhood of the Place de Grève was too crowded and frequented a part for him to hope to gain the opposite bank of the river by passing the Pont Notre Dame a procession being on foot which would, he hoped, attract every one that way. His intention was to take a boat lower down; and accordingly he hurried on, and had arrived at the quay, where he saw several boatmen, who had left their work and were conversing together with earnest gesticulations. He approached one, and perceived immediately that it was the man who had rowed him over before, whose suspicious glances he liked so little. He turned on him a sinister look and exclaimed, "Oh! you want my boat again, master Cordelier, do you? That will scarcely pass, nor your disguise either. There are plenty of Huguenots with the white cross, but we are too old to be taken in that way."

"Friend," said Montgomery, "I would cross to the other side: delay me not."

The man beckoned to his comrades, and in a moment the Count was surrounded by a set of fierce, ill-looking men, who insisted on his taking off the cross on his cap and confessing himself a Huguenot.

In vain he expostulated. Their insolence increased: and he began to fear that he must have recourse to violent means of ridding himself of their importunities, when a

cry arose at a distance — "The procession! the King!" and most of the men rushed away to join the crowd, which was issuing from a neighbouring street.

There were now but a few paces between him and the river, and he urged the first boatman to ferry him over.

"To the other world, Huguenotaille!" brutally exclaimed the man. "What signifies a fête given, if it's to be stopped directly the amusement begins?"

So saying he drew a knife from his breast, adding, as he brandished it. "'Tis but one more, and I wanted that to make up my number."

But before the stroke fell, the arm of the ruffian was grasped from behind, by a young man in the dress of one of the King's household, and he was pinioned in an instant.

Montgomery, who was unarmed, and saw little safety for himself from either of the contending parties, rushed towards the river, and at once plunged in; and being an excellent swimmer, in spite of his wounded arm, contrived to reach the opposite shore. He then looked round, and observed that his young deliverer stood alone, apparently watching him. He waved his hand in token of gratitude, and hurried on down the first street which led to the Rue St. Jacques.

The procession which had attracted the attention of the boatmen was one of the many which paraded the streets of Paris continually; and on the present occasion was made in honour of the late events.

The King, though harassed in body and mind, and allowed scarcely time to breathe from excitement, was expected to attend this solemn ceremony to the church of Notre Dame, and afterwards to be present at the Place de Grève, where a bonfire was to be exhibited, similar to those on the eve of St. John, with a few additional ceremonies, in commemoration of the late victory as it was termed.

In the centre of the great square was planted the stake, sixty feet high, round which faggots and bundles of brushwood were hung at intervals, and at its foot a huge heap of thick logs, covered with straw and other light materials.

The flag of the city of Paris waved at the top, beneath which a large basket was hung, containing a number of cats and a fox, the latter added that day for the greater amusement of his Majesty.

The chief magistrates of the city, in their robes of state, attended, the Prévôts and Sheriffs holding candles of yellow wax. These persons, approaching the King, assisted him to dismount from his horse, and presented him with an ornamented torch, alight. An immense troop of archers, cross-bowmen, and arquebusiers, surrounded the pile, and kept off the multitude, who pressed forward to see the King advance, which he presently did, and set his torch to the pile, the blazing of which was accompanied by the sound of trumpets and other noisy instruments.

As the flames rose high in the air the deafening shouts of the people, and the loud crackling of the fireworks, which were at the same moment discharged, proclaimed the general satisfaction, and many and fierce were the maledictions uttered against the heretics, and wishes that they occupied the place of the wretched animals consumed in the baskets.

He who had the courage to climb amongst the blazing pile, detach the flag from its elevation, and lay it at the King's feet, was entitled to a purse from his hand; and seldom on these occasions was there wanting an adventurous person to attempt the enterprise, though, considering, the strength of the scaffolding, and that it was never undertaken till the light wood was consumed, the hazard was not so great as it appeared.

While the shouting crowd were gazing in anxious expectation, a short thick man, with long deformed arms and legs, was suddenly seen clinging like a monkey to the stake, amidst wreaths of smoke and flashes of flame. He grinned with exultation as reaching the topmost height he laid his hand upon the flag-staff and succeeded in making himself master of it.

"Well done, Ancelin!" shouted the mob. "Success to the handsome dwarf!" cried they, as the hideous little being descended with rapidity; and leaping from amongst the fire, ran briskly to the King's feet and presented the

trophy. The reward was given him; and, as a further mark of favour, he was allowed to accompany the train of the King, and to enter the Hôtel de Ville, where his Majesty, almost stunned with the noise, and blinded with the smoke, was not sorry to take refuge.

Here the Prévôts received him with great form, and he was offered a collation, composed of perfumed comfits and different sorts of dried sweetmeats, *cornichons*, large tarts, and dishes of marchpain, in which were represented the royal arms in gilded sugar; also a variety of creams and fruit.

It was not without fear and trembling, that the Prévôt de Paris, Nantouillet, heard his Majesty say, that he still kept to his intention of paying his hotel a visit.

"You shall have," said he, "three Kings to grace your board; myself, the King of Poland my brother, and the King of Navarre. We will bring our friends, and you shall invite what ladies you please. As you are a bachelor, doubtless you will find many fair ones ready to visit you; and La Touchet and La Châteauneuf shall be our hostesses. I will name an early day, as I am not afraid of finding you unprepared."

The Prévôt stammered his grateful sense of the honour intended him; but the freshness of his pride was gone, his enthusiasm had received a check, and the mere sight of the distinguished persons, of whom he was before so fain to speak familiarly, gave him a feeling of sick terror, which he vainly tried to get the better of.

"Methinks this churl," said the King of Poland to King Charles, "does not appreciate our condescension. It were a good deed to ease him of some of the paltry possessions of which he so loves to boast."

"I purpose so to do," said Charles, with a smile such as seldom appeared on his countenance when he spoke to his brother; but this agreement with his own humour so much pleased him that, for the time, he laid aside his usual reserve to him whom he envied and disliked. "Yes, we will dine at his hotel, and devise some plot that shall give us all sport. I owe the greedy citizen a grudge for his bad

execution of the late orders respecting this canaille, of whose griefs, I trust, I am to hear no more."

"We will consult La Mole and Coconnas," said the chosen of the Polish nation: "they have always choice inventions to plague these low-bred serfs who ape their masters. We will make ourselves talked of in the good city of Paris."

Nantouillet did not hear the words of the princes, but by the expression of their countenances, and a certain foreboding of ill, he shuddered as he saw the smiles of mischief that passed between them, and heartily rejoiced was he when he hailed their departure, and had bowed out the last of their train.

"I shall quit Paris instantly," said he to his housekeeper, on returning to the Hôtel d'Hercule: "my nerves will not endure the terror these great lords, kings, and gentry inspire me with. I will pretend to be sick, any thing to escape the honour of this horrible visit. Invite La Châteauneuf! alas! the vixen who they say is too familiar with the Duke of Anjou! The saints forbid! And my niece Touchet: I have heard such things of her and the King lately, which her father's mind would never have conceived. I wondered at all her talk of great folks: she has known them to some purpose! Oh, why did I ever come to Paris and set up as a great man?"

CHAPTER II.

THE AVOWAL.

"On rencontre l'ami avec qui l'on voudrait passer ses jours, au moment où le sort va le fixer loin de nous: on découvre le cœur que l'on cherchoit, la veille du jour où ce cœur va cesser de battre."—ST. AUGUSTIN.

CLAUDE had remained sleeping, overcome with the heaviness of grief and the fatigue of watching. His dreams restored to him the snow-clad mountains of the country he called his own, romantic Bearn. Shadows flitted across his fancy which had never visited him in his waking

moments, and forms, of which he had no recollection, appeared familiarly connected with all that occurred to him. The students, the Cordelier, the face of Bianco,—all rose to his imagination, and mixed themselves up with contention and massacre. The image of Alix in danger, struggling and calling to him for help, recurred frequently. He tried to reach her, and she was held from him by her father; then her figure changed to one unknown, and, dimly developed, it flitted along like a spectre, and as it approached a livid hue spread over the features; the pale hands held a chain of hair, which he endeavoured to grasp, and making a violent effort to do so he awoke. He had risen from his recumbent posture, and found he held in his hand the chain which he constantly wore round his neck, the same which he saw so clearly in his dream. He kissed this sole relic of his former fortunes, and turned it in every direction, hoping to discover the spring which René had found so readily, but without effect. It seemed singular that the Italian should have known what was concealed with so much care, and he regretted bitterly not having learnt the secret at that moment, as he was now but little likely to attain the knowledge which he so much desired.

While he was reflecting on this he heard Mabille's step approaching, and hastily replaced the beloved chain in his bosom. She was agitated and pale, but recounted to him what had passed between her and the King, and informed him that Charles had desired that he should be brought before him. He followed her accordingly, and, with anxious hearts, they both took their way to the royal apartments.

The King was seated on a couch, supported by cushions; his countenance was care-worn and sad, his brow contracted, and his head languidly reclined on his hand.

He was sunk into a reverie from which the entrance of Mabille roused him. Looking wildly on Claude he exclaimed,—

"Let me not behold one of that race of victims—take him away!

"Sire," said Mabille gently, as she approached him, "be calm I entreat you. I bring a grateful being who

comes to thank his royal preserver both for himself and for your poor nurse, his friend."

"Yes, dear Mabille," cried Charles, embracing her with almost childish fondness, — "yes, I saved my own dear nurse, the only person in the whole world who loves me!"

"Say not so, sire," answered she, "I beseech you; your subjects love you, and none more than they whom cruel and interested persons have misrepresented to your Grace."

"They have no cause," groaned the miserable young monarch; "but let your friend approach, he need not fear me."

Claude accordingly came forward, and was graciously questioned by Charles on several points relative to his fortunate escape, his connexion with the house of Navarre, and his prospects for the future.

On the latter subject Claude professed his uncertainty.

Charles mused a moment and then said: —

"I know not how far my power will protect you beyond the walls of my palace, but you are at liberty to remain here for the present, till tranquillity is restored to this turbulent city. You can assume the livery of my household, as page to Dame Mabille: but remember, I will have no spies about me. You are free — disguise yourself cunningly — and take heed that your bearing betray you not."

The King smiled, for the mystery of the affair seemed to amuse him and divert his mind from more serious matters, and he dismissed him graciously; while Claude, greatly relieved, as far as regarded his personal safety, retired, with the intention of taking instant steps in order to ascertain the fate of Alix, of whose situation he was painfully uncertain.

Mabille lost no time in procuring for him a dress similar to those worn by the servants of the royal household, and gave out that he was a relation of her own, just received into the service of the King. In this guise, and having darkened his complexion as much as possible, and dyed his eyebrows and hair, he could with difficulty be recognised, except by the quick eye of affection, or the equally keen

glance of hatred. The latter he proposed to avoid as much as possible by shunning the presence of René, should they encounter in the palace. In this disguise Claude resolved to steal forth as soon as possible, and seek the President's house, hoping to learn news of her who occupied all his thoughts.

They had ascertained that Bianco accompanied the procession; and judging that the occupation thus given to the populace would render it less dangerous for them to venture out, Mabille and her supposed page took their way to the habitation of Bailly.

At every step traces of the most hideous kind were rife of the recent slaughter: the river rolled along a tide, the sanguine colour of which belonged not to its waters, and heaps of dead lay piled upon its shores. The gates and doors of the palace told the horrors which had been committed near them: the broken lattices, the defaced and half-burnt houses, the pillaged shops and their few gloomy-looking inhabitants, the heaps of stones, and scattered fragments of weapons, all told a tale too horrible for the mind to dwell upon.

"And Alix!" thought Claude, "in the midst of all this carnage and confusion, can she be uninjured?"

At length they reached the President's house, but were at first stoutly refused admittance. Mabille, however, induced the servant, who knew her, to inform Alix of her desire to see her, and she was accordingly permitted to enter, but she took the precaution of ordering Claude to remain in the antechamber till he was summoned, lest his too-ready admission should excite suspicion.

The nurse found her unhappy young friend, who flew to throw herself into her arms, and weep upon her bosom, while she recounted all that had occurred to her on the night of the beginning of the massacre.

"I have but one means left me of escape," said she; "that is my only resource, and to that I shall be obliged to resort. But tell me, dear Mabille! oh, tell me, can you conjecture what has been the fate of the unfortunate Claude? The massacre, supposed to be concluded, is far from being so. It is not so open as before, but our people are falling

in every street, in every house, and there is none to deliver them!"

"Dear Alix!" said the nurse, "take comfort, Claude Emars is in safety, and under the protection of the King!"

With a sudden burst of joy, Alix cast herself upon her knees and returned thanks to Heaven for his preservation. Earnestly did she listen while Mabille recounted all the particulars attending their mutual escape. When she had concluded, the daughter of the President exclaimed—

"Heaven be praised for this signal mercy! But how will the persecuted youth escape the snares laid for him?"

"He is, my dear child," returned Mabille, "disguised by the command of Charles himself, as my page; and if he can avoid meeting with his deadly foe, may remain in safety. But his distraction to know your fate overcame every other consideration, and he accompanied me hither."

"Oh, heavens!" cried Alix, turning as pale as death. "Here! in this fatal house, which is full of danger for him! —entreat him instantly to quit these walls. Yet, no," she continued, "he has braved all for my sake! I must see him, at least, to repeat my thanks."

Claude on being summoned, sprang forward in a delirium of joy, and threw himself at the feet of Alix, whose extended hand he clasped in uncontrollable emotion, while she stood bathed in tears, and looking on him with interest which it was vain to attempt to conceal.

"Do I behold you indeed in safety?" cried Claude; "whatever trials may henceforth await me I can endure them without a murmur, since your life, so far more precious than my own, is secure."

"Alas!" replied Alix, scarcely conscious of the warmth of his expressions in the delight she felt at seeing him after the terrors she had experienced while believing him exposed to danger, "you must be gone: this place is but a sepulchre for you; come not near me, attempt not to see me, for I can only bring destruction on my friends."

"Oh! were it possible," exclaimed Claude, "that to my joy in beholding you safe I could add the power of serving you."

"You have a heart, Claude," said Alix, firmly, "and

an arm for your country and your friends. Our party is not yet abandoned, our cause is not yet crushed; it only wants defenders, and it will once more revive, nay one day triumph. Why not join those who fight for their rights against oppression?"

"True!" cried Claude, rising with enthusiasm; "your words inspire me with new hope, new ardour. Why should not this single arm be useful in our cause? Blessings on you for this gleam of hope, for this ray which has kindled a glorious ambition. Oh! were but Navarre free! could he once more lead on his devoted followers! but the time shall come; there are thousands will rise to revenge this outrage, whose zeal had otherwise slept, and Coligni will yet be avenged."

"Speak not of vengeance, Claude," said Alix. "Heaven will take its own time. We strive for justice and for right, and our holy cause will prosper. It was but now I heard my father tell that the brave citizens of La Rochelle refused to admit the murderous band sent to their town; they spurned the royal orders, and have thrown off all allegiance."

"Is it possible?" cried Claude; "then there is indeed hope; their bold example will be followed, and much may yet be accomplished."

"Be not rash," rejoined Alix, "nor attempt flight too soon, or you may injure instead of furthering the good intent: should you be able to reach La Rochelle, my uncle De Hommet, who holds a high position there, may be of service. Take this ring, therefore, as it may happen," she continued, while her voice faltered; — "it may happen that we shall not meet again, — at all events you can provide yourself with this token, which he will know, for it was his last gift to his dead sister, and tell my cousin Lessaline that I grieve in secret for our long separation, doomed perhaps to be eternal!"

As she spoke, she took from her finger a ring which Claude received with emotion; her tears flowed fast, and it was with difficulty he was able to utter in broken sentences,

"Dear madam — Alix — let us hope that this cloud will

pass away, and that many happy hours are yet in store for you."

"No," said Alix, throwing herself into a seat, overcome with grief; "no, there is no choice for me but death. I cannot be the wife of the detested Bianco!"

"His wife!" cried Claude, starting, while every nerve trembled with horror:—"his wife! death were indeed better; but what dreadful alternative do you propose?"

"Alas!" exclaimed Alix, "to save my father's life, I made a horrible promise, which as I cannot keep, the forfeit must be paid. Mabille will relate to you that fearful scene; I cannot breathe its terrors again. Suffice it that I must be a victim."

"You must not, shall not!" cried Claude, passionately. "Oh, Alix! forgive and pity me when I dare to make an avowal which your danger only could draw from me. My heart is torn with a thousand feelings, my soul distracted with a thousand terrors for you; hear, then, with indulgence a wretched being, who, exposed to the same dangers as yourself, professing the same pure faith, has dared to love you, and who dares to proclaim his weakness; who has no hope nor ever cherished any, but would perish to serve—to save you. Turn not away from me, I ask but to be permitted to devote my life to aid you. Fly from the wretch who is unworthy even to hear your name; fly to your uncle in La Rochelle; suffer me to conduct you,—to guard and defend you. It will not be difficult to devise some plan for your escape, fear not for your father; his known attachment to the Catholic cause will prevent suspicion resting on him; confide in my devotion and respect. The moment you are safe in the protection of De Hommet, I will quit your sight, nor shall my presumptuous passion ever again intrude on your peaceful solitude."

Hurried away by the impetuosity of his feelings, Claude had, in discovering the state of his affections, convinced Alix, but too clearly, how much her own corresponded with her lover's. It was, therefore, with secret joy, though with astonishment and consternation, that she listened to a proposal which in the devoted generosity of

his mind, rather than instigated by prudence, he had made.

"Oh Claude," she said gently, "your words are wild and strange, and you propose impossibilities; alas! are you not proscribed and fugitive."

"Oh heavens!" returned Claude — "it is but too true; I deserve that you should reject my weak assistance. I know but too well how unworthy I must appear of your slightest regard."

"Hold!" interrupted Alix, blushing deeply. "We are fatally — I fear eternally, separated. I see no hope for you, no escape for myself: had it been otherwise, I would not have hesitated to acknowledge, that, instead of flying from you, I had remained to encourage you with brighter prospects for the future, and had assured you that neither aversion nor indifference caused me to listen to your noble offers without one word of consolation." — She hesitated.

"Say but," said Claude, imploringly, — "say but that I am not contemned and hated!"

"No, Claude," replied Alix; "you are esteemed, regretted!"

As she pronounced the last words she quitted the chamber, leaving Claude scarcely conscious whether sorrow or delight was predominant in his mind.

Mabille had remained in the outer chamber during the latter part of this interview, anxiously watching lest any movement should announce the return of Bailly; and when Claude joined her she resolved instantly to leave the house in order that a longer delay might not create remark. The nurse and her page, therefore, prepared to return to the palace, and Claude having seen her safely to the gates, had lingered behind to gaze on the spectacle of confusion which all around presented, when he was attracted by a crowd, and the vociferous exclamation and fierce gestures of a party of boatmen. Conceiving that some Protestants were in danger, he hurried towards the group in time, as has been already recounted, to rescue from outrage, and probably death, a man in the dress of a peasant, in whom, however, he thought he recognised his former acquaintance of a moment, the Cordelier, and, but for the

prompt and bold method taken by the person assailed to escape, namely, by leaping into the river, his exertions had probably been in vain. He represented to the brutal boatmen that the King's late orders were positive that no Huguenot should be attacked, and as he appeared in the livery of the royal household, the man reluctantly and sullenly shook off his hold and slunk muttering away, while he had the satisfaction of seeing the bold swimmer reach the opposite shore in safety. He then returned hastily to the Louvre, as he feared the royal *cortége*, which was now approaching, would shortly arrive, and render his entrance less easy.

CHAPTER III.

LE PETIT FEUILLANT.

"Dost know this waterfly?"— *Hamlet.*

WHILE so much sorrow, terror, and anxiety occupied the minds of all classes in Paris, the fashionable world, then as at all other times, had not given up any amusement likely to drive away reflection.

In one of the fine hotels, situated in the neighhourhood of the palace, dwelt the Count la Mole, the most elegant, refined, and handsome cavalier in Paris.

He and his inseparable friend, the Count Coconnas, had distinguished themselves greatly in the late business, and proved their right to the reputation of good Catholics by their cruelty to the devoted sect whom it was the great object to exterminate.

Both were, a few days after the beginning of the massacre, seated languidly on velvet couches in the study of La Mole, who was employed in looking over some papers which had been presented to him by a valet in waiting.

Coconnas held in his hand a volume of the songs of Ronsard, fragments of which he every now and then sang in a clear, rich voice, evidently enjoying the beauty of the

poetry, and charmed with the learned allusions of the author. He was less handsome than his companion, but had a distinguished air and a faultless figure, of which he was extremely vain. His peculiarly small foot and hand were the objects of his own devoted admiration; and he held all who possessed not these beauties as worthless in the scale of existence, and beneath the notice of a man who was looked upon as a gentleman.

La Mole continued to turn over the papers on his table with one white hand, whose delicacy might vie with that of his friend, and with the other combed with a small comb of mother-of-pearl his luxuriant moustache, whose extremities he was careful to guide into an upward curl, then considered necessary to perfect propriety.

"Belistre!" he exclaimed, at length, to his attendant; using terms to an inferior then always indulged in by a man of *ton* "miserable dolt and idiot! why were not these given to me before?"

"My lord," answered, the valet, in the humblest accent, "was so occupied, — so enthusiastically engaged in the extermination of the Huguenotaille, that his slave did not venture."

"True, — I had forgotten," said the great man; "the swine have too long occupied my attention. Give me some comfits, and place a table near; then withdraw."

His commands were obeyed, and the friends were left alone.

"Lay aside the divine poet, my dear Coconnas," resumed La Mole, "for a few moments, for here is something of the utmost consequence, to which we must attend. This is a petition from the Florentine Ganasso, imploring me to bring his new troop of players into fashion, which I have resolved to do, and I will make it a law,—a duty, to visit them. The King's consent had better be gained, because one would not willingly leave him out of the party: but I shall take care that they succeed. I will instantly send orders round to the court that a day be named to witness these representations, and to be absent from them will henceforth be a mark of churlish breeding. Nothing, my dear Coconnas, should be endured in Paris

but Italian comedians: they are the only beings to whom nature has granted taste or talent,—they have voices to warble, they have feet to dance, denied to all others. Great Jupiter! to think we should be deprived of our Italians! Better perish, like these accursed Huguenots! to hear one of whose hoarse psalms, droned out by a congregation of them, is to take leave of existence with disgust. Were it for nothing but the depravity of their taste, they deserve the fate which they are now suffering."

"Most true," said Coconnas. "Willingly will I lend my aid to assist these persecuted foreigners, dear as they deservedly are to every soul that can feel."

"The sun shall not go down before their fame is established," said La Mole; "would that we lived in those delicious realms where harmony can be commanded by the sword. I would have a musical company made so perfect that none could find the shadow of a fault in any one performer; but the great end must be achieved thus:—every Saturday that wretch's life should be taken from him, who in the course of the week had uttered a false note, and he should be replaced by another, tried and proved; by this means, a second offence would rarely be committed, and one could listen until Paradise seemed spreading round, and its angels warbling their divine strains to our enraptured senses!"

"My friend!" exclaimed Coconnas, with warmth, "you inspire me with zeal and pleasure; already I feel a new creature. I will hasten myself to these Italians, and make glad their hearts by my communications."

"Do so," said La Mole: "this is nearly my hour of devotion, and I have much of importance to consult about with Cosmo Ruggieri, previously; leave me, therefore, dear Coconnas; to you I delegate my authority; see that Alberto and his troop are well bestowed—till two hours hence, farewell!"

La Mole sunk back in his seat while Coconnas rose from his, and after a little delay, that his nerves might not be overwhelmed by too much haste, he threw his short embroidered cloak over his shoulders, gazed at his fine teeth, in his little pocket-mirror, smoothed out the ringlets

of his silken hair, and twisted them anew over the comb which confined them at the back, kissed his small fingers to his friend, and glided out of the apartment.

He was scarcely departed when Signor Cosmo Ruggieri, the philosopher, was announced. This was the well-known favourite of the Queen-mother, whose deep researches in astrology had gained him great reputation at court, and who was said to have in his possession the Secret of Secrets itself, a fact which was denied by René Bianco, who, though obliged to endure his companionship, held him as a rival, and a dangerous one; but as he possessed none of the companionable and agreeable qualities of the perfumer, Catherine held him in a different degree of favour. Nevertheless, these artful and designing men, aware that each was labouring for himself, would willingly have compassed the other's absence and disgrace, and were constantly lying in wait for a convenient opportunity to do so.

It had become a mode for all persons of fashion to consult Ruggieri, and in that period, when intrigue and superstition were combined, his services were found most valuable, and few persons of rank considered their day complete if they had failed to receive a visit from the Astrologer Royal.

He was ushered into the study of La Mole, and advanced towards him with a grave step. His stature was tall, and his figure slight, a very fine flowing white beard, which covered his breast, was the only indication of age about him, for his face was smooth, and his eyes black, piercing, and remarkably bright. These circumstances gave colour to the report that he had renewed his youth by art, and that, as some appearance of age was said always to be borne by persons under this spell, he had chosen the venerable appendage which distinguished him, as it in nowise took from the imposing character of his face, and answered his purpose completely. His anecdotes were extraordinary of times gone by: he appeared always to have lived in a court, either in France or other countries, and spoke of his personal knowledge of many celebrated characters of history. He feigned to be displeased if asked to explain how he could, at his apparent

age, have known them, and it was now thought a mark of ill breeding to question the mysterious philosopher, who was listened to with awe, and regarded as a being of a species belonging to a distant world. As it was fashionable to credit him, those who treated him as a cheat did not venture to name their opinion, which was considered little better than treason, as the Queen-mother's faith was firm in his favour. It was only, therefore, out of the charmed pale that Cosmo Ruggieri was contemned and ridiculed as well as his friends and patrons, among whom one of the most distinguished was Count la Mole.

The man of fashion greeted the philosopher with great cordiality. "Good Cosmo," said he, "I have much for which to thank you; the waxen image which your art has constructed for me has done its duty, and I have but little to complain of. The ladies of the court are very kind; nevertheless, without your learned assistance, I am extremely at a loss, because, except I can ascertain the planet which governs her whose favour I would win, I cannot have recourse to the figure."

"True," replied Cosmo, "that is absolutely necessary to be known; but there are few ladies of note whose nativities I have not cast, and I am, therefore, able to offer you any information you can require. The heart of the image is, you know, covered with circles, round which the planets appear: when you are aware of that, whose influence is requisite, you must prick the heart in the spot above which the planet rests, repeating, of course, the words in whose meaning I have instructed you."

"This I have done, father," said La Mole, solemnly; "but you will, perhaps, start to hear that I at this moment pursue three different plans. I am enamoured of three persons, all in opposite spheres of life, whose planets are unknown to me. The name of the first, under a seal of the deepest secrecy, I will first impart; and you must regulate our proceedings accordingly."

He leant forward, and whispered in the astrologer's ear a name at which he seemed surprised —

"This," said Cosmo, "is difficult indeed, but not impossible; and will demand a separate image. All that is

royal stands apart from the rest of earth, and acts not in concert with it. It will take time and study. However, it fortunately happens," he added, taking from under his robe a small book and consulting it, "that your star is placed at this moment so happily that any thing undertaken by or for you now is likely to succeed."

"Indeed!" said La Mole eagerly; "then spare no expense, no pains! Take this purse, good Cosmo, and call on me for more when necessary. My star is, then, in a good position?"

"Excellent!" said the astrologer, pocketing the gold. "But tell me, my lord, who are the others, besides this royal divinity, with whom I can serve you?"

"One," said La Mole, "is the King's mistress, Marie Touchet."

"Indeed!" said Ruggieri. "And the third?"

"Oh—the third," replied La Mole, "stands in another position altogether."

"If the honoured fair," said Cosmo, smiling, "is a citizen's or peasant's daughter there need be no magic in the case, perhaps."

"She is neither," returned La Mole. "I should not, of course, require the aid I seek if I had time or inclination to exert the talents or fascinations with which I am quite aware that nature has gifted me; but, my dear Ruggieri, time to me is every thing. The beauty who attracts me now is the daughter of Bailly; he who is president of accounts, and in good favour at this moment. She is placed in an intermediate rank, and consequently difficult to approach."

"How?" interrupted Cosmo: "you speak of the intended bride of René Bianco."

"Is she so?" said La Mole, languidly; "then it were an act of chivalry to rescue her from such a fate. She merits better than to be the wife of a low perfumer, however high in the Queen's favour he may stand."

"My lord," said Ruggieri eagerly, "whatever I can do to serve you, command. René is my friend, and I should be sorry to do him an ill turn; yet, to forward your views, I give up all selfish considerations."

"I shall," said the courtier, "imagine some scheme to see this little piece of perfection, for such she is, again; and we will then think of the how and the when to get her into my power. My mind begins to be fatigued with this deep thought. Attend, my dear Cosmo, to the royal image — that is my chief care; the rest I have no objection to leave, at present, to chance. Hark! I hear a well-known footstep; it is that of my confessor, Montgaillard. Farewell! the astrologer must give place to the divine, and I have much of which to unburthen my mind, not having had time for several days to see my holy adviser."

As La Mole spoke he crossed himself devoutly, for his attention to the forms of religion was so exemplary and edifying that it was a theme of universal remark. The King himself was accustomed to say, that the number of sins La Mole had committed might be easily known by the masses he said; and seldom did a day pass in which he had not heard three.

A gentle tap at the private door of the courtier's study announced the holy man, and Cosmo retiring, entrance was given to the singular character in whose keeping was the conscience of the accomplished, unprincipled, prince of coxcombs, La Mole.

Bernard Percin de Montgaillard was of the order of Feuillans, who at this period were not established in a convent of their own at Paris, but for whom the care of the Queen-mother was endeavouring to provide one near the royal gardens. He was esteemed one of the most eloquent preachers of his time; had a fine, clear voice, of which he was very vain, and the echo of which he appeared to delight in hearing; he was followed and admired by all the court party, particularly the female part, to whom, indeed, his sermons were generally addressed, and for whose admiration he strove, for whose applause he sighed, wept, was powerful or pathetic, denounced or soothed, as the case might be. No lady of distinction failed to secure his offices as confessor to herself and family; and having Cosmo as astrological adviser, the fashionable *ménage* was complete.

Montgaillard was small of stature and corpulent: owing to a defect in one foot, he walked very lame, which misfortune he endeavoured to conceal under a constant shuffling motion, almost amounting to a dance.

He wore his beard long, contrary to the established rules respecting persons of his profession, and had with difficulty obtained admission into the order to which he belonged, in consequence of his determined adherence to a mode which he considered peculiarly becoming to his physiognomy. His little sparkling eyes looked out from beneath a cowl which he loved to cast back, and thus display his expansive forehead, which it pained him to conceal: his rosary was slung over one shoulder, and on his bosom, as was the custom with prelates and abbés of distinction, he wore a golden cross set with pearls intermixed with fine rubies. His teeth were large and white, and he took infinite care that they should be made manifest, for which reason he wore a continual smile; his nose was the failure in his face, for, to his own unspeakable annoyance, it was short and flat. As he entered the apartment he held up his robe with an affected air, and fanned himself with an embroidered handkerchief, from which issued a strong perfume of musk.

"How is it with you, beau et révérend?" exclaimed La Mole, rising; "how exquisite you look this morning! radiant with success, no doubt?"

"Yes," said Le Petit Feuillant, as he was familiarly termed,—"passibly so; two sweet creatures fainted at my sermon this morning, and I give you my word, to hear the sobs of others, and witness their streaming tears almost unmanned me. I will be less pathetic to-morrow, for it grieves me to cause them sorrow who should be all smiles and joy; however, we parted gaily, for I told them my next discourse should be on a subject which would call forth all their interest—that of love—heavenly love of course;—don't you think it a charming theme?"

"Perfect!" said La Mole; "but you are positively becoming too dangerous a rival; no eyes at church but are for you; no conversation out of it but is of you: and who has a chance when you are near?"

The gratified abbé simperingly replied in a humble tone, "Alas! my thoughts are all spiritual; my metaphors, though drawn from earth, aspire above. But say, my son, shall we begin our devotional exercises? in order that, those accomplished, I may have leisure to recount to you a few amusing anecdotes and lively adventures of certain persons whom you know."

This hint was enough; La Mole instantly complied with the holy father's desire, and the ceremony of confession was gone through with all due gravity: absolution being bestowed, and every particular strictly attended to, Le Petit Feuillant cast aside his clerical character, and assumed that for which he was so well fitted, namely, confidant of the worldly business or pleasure of his penitent, and retailer of all the scandal of the Court.

"In the first place, have you heard," said he, "that the divine Marguerite is actually in love with the Bearnais, her husband, and that is the reason that, of late, no new aspirant has appeared for her favour?"

"Monstrous!" said La Mole, indignantly: "that I will never believe: I know she cares not for D'Entragues, nor Tavannes, nor fifty others; but the Bearnais — that would be too preposterous! By the way, I had forgotten his existence; was he not killed in the *mêlée?*"

"No," replied the Feuillant, carelessly, "no; she begged his life, and that probably gave rise to the absurd report. She is full of feminine feelings, and would as soon have entreated for her dog."

"It is to be hoped that the idiot Gascon has no idea that he is so honoured," said La Mole; "it would make him insufferable! Oh! the smell of garlic and leather whenever he appears! How can she even support his presence!"

"Of course," returned Montgaillard, "if he dares to hope for her regard, there are plenty to invent sayings of hers to undeceive him; we must never allow such folly, such treason to rob us of our Urania. The Queen-mother is going to marry her perfumer René, and to such a divinity!"

"I know it," replied La Mole, "and there you will

smile to hear I am interested." He then related to the monk the circumstances of his fancy for Alix, and his wish to withdraw her from her father's protection.

"I am," said the Petit Feuillant, "perfectly acquainted with the damsel you allude to, nor do I condemn your admiration; she is lovely. I think it will be in my power to assist you in this matter, as I have at this moment some dealings with the President, relative to the purchase of the Abbey of Bourgueil, in Anjou, for which he hesitates to give our convent eighteen thousand crowns. I have, in consequence of his indecision, allowed the negotiation to drop, but can renew it at any time, if by so doing I can forward the views of my friend."

"Thank you sincerely," answered La Mole. "This looks well; we must of course prevent this René from marrying the girl for the present."

"I fancy," said Montgaillard, laughing, "he is too good a Catholic to be much distressed by delay, for I shrewdly suspect our little beauty of heresy. Mort dieu! we must put him on his guard!"

"Well," said La Mole, "this is fortunate; for if we fail otherwise, it is only to issue an accusation against her, and she is at once in my power. There needs little form of trial on such ground. We don't want her to be massacred, however; and I suppose that affair goes on still?"

"No," said the monk: "it lasted seven days; and in Paris alone, they say, ten thousand of the locusts are got rid of; but the King is weak beyond belief, and has issued a second order that the Huguenots are to be protected."

"Folly!" said La Mole: "they will rise anew, and we shall have all the trouble over again. Coconnas tells me, he was quite weary of slaying, and his method at last was comic enough: he bought a great many as they were going to be slaughtered, and kept them to kill at his leisure."*

"Admirable!" laughed Le Petit Feuillant. "What an original conception! But what have you here?—players? more arrivals from Italy?"

"Yes," said the Patron; "some wretches whom I in-

* On record.

tend to protect, because they have been persecuted by the Vandals of parliament, and because I love good verses and sweet voices."

"I rejoice at their good fortune," lisped the foppish priest, "inasmuch as I have a quarrel against that impertinent comedian Pontalais, who came the other day before my church beating his discordant tambour whilst I was delivering my famous discourse against extravagance in apparel. I had reached a most striking period, namely a passage in the Revelations of St. Bridget, in which she describes the torments endured in the other world by a mother for having decked her daughter, with great nicety and cost, in the hope of gaining a husband for the damsel. I raised my voice higher as I proceeded, and you know it has a peculiarly full, loud, and thrilling tone, when I choose to exert it; and I saw several of my fair congregation endeavouring to conceal in their bosoms the St. Esprits set in diamonds, now so much worn, a fashion unmeet and sinful, unless adopted by the ministers of Holy Church — I raised my voice, I say, higher as I found the stunning sound of the buffoon's tambour continued, but the insolent varlet outnoised me, till, becoming irritated, I descended from the pulpit, and advancing towards him, desired to know how he dared be so bold as to beat his tambour while I was preaching. The rascal threw himself into a grotesque attitude, and, coming up to me with a limping gait, waving his hand and showing his teeth, cried out, 'How dare you be so bold as to preach while I beat my tambour?' This was too much. I drew the small knife I always carry, and slashed his odious and clamorous instrument in several places, and was then retiring, when the irreverend reprobate rushed after me, and forced over my head the frame of his disabled tambour, which hung round my throat like a huge ruff. I should have been the less annoyed had not this scene excited much laughter amongst my fair flock, whose eyes, I grieve to say, wandered in mirthful admiration after the handsome vagabond."

La Mole did not attempt to restrain his risibility at this account, in which the good-natured priest joined; then suddenly starting up, he danced across the chamber, and

taking up a lute, touched a few chords with much grace and science.

"Music," said he, "is the soother of all vexations, the softener of all animosities. I will sing you a few stanzas from the 'Flamme d'Amour' of our young poet, Du Trellon, whose verses may vie with Ronsard's himself."

So saying, in a clear voice, and with much gesticulation and ornament, he sang to a favourite and then greatly admired air —

In sooth, if she I love
Knows not to reprove,
I love her ever!

But if my fair one's eyes
Make no fond replies,
At once I leave her.

When on her cheek I see
Smiles that beam for me,
I live to love her!

But if I seek in vain
Gentle looks to gain,
My flame is over.

Though life's uncertain span
I'd cherish while I can,
And banish sadness,

Yet I'd endure Love's care,
So she but take her share,
And think it gladness!

"Charmingly sung!" exclaimed La Mole; "and a pretty thing, with spirit and gaiety. I dare say the young poet will improve. Let him take for his model the great star of the all-dazzling Pleïad Oh! there is the rich imagery, the learned elegance, the charm that carries away the soul! What does not our language owe to our immortal Ronsard for transplanting into its meagre soil the full flowers of Greek luxuriance, and raising such incomparable riches of versification from the treasures of Greece and Rome!"

"It seems to me," said the priest, "that you have incorrectly bestowed on him the epithet of immortal. His compositions, with the exception of a few, are too learned, too obscure for the generality of readers, who, it is true, admire and wonder at that which they do not understand, but retain only such poetry as touches their feelings; and after all, it is by the mass, by the people, in fact, that the memory of the muse is handed down to after times. If we

could live a century hence, it would not surprise me to find the name of Ronsard forgotten, his poems neglected, and some new poet called immortal in his stead."

"Treason!" cried La Mole; "I will never believe it! never imagine that the splendid compositions of Ronsard can cease to charm till time itself shall be no more."

"Was not Clement Marot as famous in his day?" said the priest.

"True," answered the courtier critic; "but his decline may be dated from the time when those accursed Huguenots began to drone the Psalms he had translated into French, to their own nasal tunes. But we must quit this discourse, for the day wanes, and I have much to do. Oh! my dear Montgaillard! I have a fête in embryo, to which you are invited. It is to be something exquisite; and to-day I shall see about my guests, and choose amongst the fair ones of the Court those who are in the best looks, for there is no greater mistake than inviting women, however lovely, if they are cross or ill; it spoils the most admirably-regulated affair; and as I shall have but few, all must be perfect."

He called his valet as he spoke, who brought them refreshments, and afterwards presented his master with his perfumed gloves, his short cloak, and the little velvet cap, ornamented with three small pointed feathers, then called "the Anjou bonnet," having been adopted lately by that prince. Casting a last glance on the mirror which hung to his girdle, he led the way to the Louvre, followed by his ambling confessor.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DISCLOSURE.

"Ay, but I must, and you must hear me too." — *Venice Preserved.*

La Mole and his companion repaired to the apartments of the Queen-mother at the Hôtel de la Reine, where she was accustomed to receive visitors without form; and a

chosen few were permitted to attend, amongst whom the fashionable Count was one of the most welcome. Catherine was surrounded by her favourite ladies, and had apparently cast off all recollections that could bring unpleasant thoughts in their train. She listened with great interest to the proposal of La Mole to patronise Ganasso, and agreed at once that a day should be named on which his theatre should be opened, and all the Court attend.

"Navarre!" she exclaimed, suddenly turning to the young King, of whom she never lost sight, and who was constantly obliged to be near her; "Navarre, you shall be of our party, and Marguerite shall carry all her ladies, to make the pomp the greater. Look not so coldly my son; you must learn to forget your homely Gascon habits, and indulge in our Court gaiety, or you will shame our teaching."

"Madam," said Henry, with a voice which he endeavoured to render calm, "I would willingly forget much which it is my misfortune to remember."

Catherine bit her lip. "Where is Bianco?" said she, hastily, to one of her ladies. "Let him bring me the essence for his Grace, who has slept ill, and fares not as I could wish. La Mole," she added, with assumed gaiety, "they tell me you are about to give us a fête; pray am I to be one of the chosen guests, for we all tremble, I assure you, lest we should any of us be excluded?"

"Your Grace," said La Mole, humbly, "is too condescending to deign to inquire respecting my intentions. I would willingly beat down my walls, and make a plain of my poor morsel of garden to accommodate all those to whom my heart points, but as I cannot control the sordid fate which confines me in a nutshell, I have only room for fairies. Here is a list of my intended guests. I throw myself upon your generosity to add no more, and not to change a name, either male or female."

Catherine took the paper, read it, and smiled.

"You will see us, then," she answered, "looking our best, since such is your command, monarch as you are, and tyrant of fashion. But you must coax Marguerite, who does not leave her chamber, and keeps her beauties with

her there, so that we are shorn of half our beams. Oh, René," she added, as he entered, " you are there? Methinks your mistress occupies much of your time. I admire your choice extremely. Bianco is about to marry the daughter of the President Bailly," she continued, turning to La Mole. " I wish you could see her."

" I have no such wish, madam," answered La Mole, combing his moustaches, and waving his head languidly backwards and forwards, while he rested first on one leg and then on the other, marks of extraordinary fashion at that period, and a practice resorted to by all his followers; " my eyes are dazzled enough already in this presence, they are too weak to endure more light."

" I saw her," said Coconnas, waving his head also, and exhibiting his white hand, covered with rings, while he took a sweatmeat from a little jewelled box offered him by one of the Queen's ladies, " I saw her; but she has a sullen, melancholy look. René, you must see to this, for we will patronise her when she is your wife, and we cannot admit clouds into our sky."

" Her father is to-day named superintendent of finance and counsellor of state," said Catherine, " so you will have a more exalted bride René; we must make your dower worthy of her. Let her be at our new pastime to-morrow, and bid her, above all, be gay."

" Madonna," said René, humbly, with a voice of deep servility, such as he was accustomed to use when he addressed the Queen in public, " overwhelms her slave with goodness. Alix will leap for joy at the news I shall carry her, and your Grace will see her at the Italian play as fair as sunny day, without a cloud."

While Catherine was receiving from the artful Florentine these assurances of the willingness of Alix to comply with her desire, the unfortunate girl was a prey to grief and d spair. The promise extorted from her in a moment of disraction appeared in all its appalling terrors to her mind. It was true that Bianco had not sought to intrude upon her solitude, had not dared to present himself before her, but she knew that her father met him constantly, that their friendship was apparently the same as ever, and she

felt sure that no change had taken place in his intentions; but that he watched her as a wild animal watches its prey, to spring upon it should escape be meditated.

Then Claude's romantic avowal, and her own tacit acknowledgment of interest in him, all returned with tenfold force, and she trembled for the consequences of the step she meditated.

The President was aware, meantime, too late, of the unworthiness of his proposed son-in-law; but the toils were woven closely round him, and he could not recede. The fear of death, lately so vividly brought before his eyes, returned at every hesitating reflection, and he endeavoured to blind himself to the real character of the man to whom his only child was destined.

He represented to Alix the certain destruction which must ensue if she retracted her promise, and urged her, by every argument he could call forth, not to sacrifice herself and her father to an aversion without foundation.

"He saved our lives," said Bailly, "from the infuriated populace; surely we owe him some gratitude for that service."

"Say not so, my father," said Alix, shuddering; "say not that he saved us; it was he who led them hither, he who excited their fury, and drove them to seek for slaughter. His hands are red with the blood of the innocent; and must I be given up to such a monster?"

"Alix," replied the President, "he acted but as many were obliged to do, in defence of liberty and life. A fearful and treasonous plot had been discovered against the King, and had it not been providentially made known, we had been massacred without mercy by the blood-thirsty Huguenots, whom to exterminate is to render service to Heaven, as well as to secure the sacred life of Charles."

"Father," said Alix, solemnly, "you know not what you say. Heaven has no enemies so hateful, none so vile, and sinful, and accursed, as the authors and actors of this immolation."

"How!" said Bailly, angrily, "do I hear a child of mine advocate the cause of heresy and treason?"

"No, father," exclaimed Alix, firmly, "you hear the

truth. The Protestant subjects of the King were neither traitors nor rebels; they were pious Christians, pure, innocent, and confiding, and they were sacrificed to a detestable and cruel policy, but it will be in vain. Though in the capital of this deluded kingdom there have been found butchers to do a deed at which humanity starts back appalled, yet in extended France the people have risen against this cruelty and oppression."

"Hold, Alix!" cried the President, turning pale, "you forget yourself and me; your words are wild and irreverend. Silence, I command you!"

"I must speak on, father," continued Alix, in a resolute tone, "and you must hear me.—hear, too, a secret which I have cherished from my infancy, and which I had never dared reveal, but that I feel the time is come to suffer and endure. I am a Protestant!"

The President uttered a shriek, and fell back in his seat, covering his face with his clenched hands.

"Girl," he exclaimed, "pronounce not your own doom! Unsay the dreadful word, and let me look on you again without the certainty that your days are numbered."

"It is too late," replied Alix. "At the altar, if I must appear there, in the face of all the foes of my religion, will I proclaim the truth, and claim the punishment they delight to accord. But fear not, my dear father; you shall be safe, your treasured life shall not be compromised. I will protest your innocence, your ignorance of my crime, and offer myself as the sole victim. I shall perish, but escape a fate far worse than lingering death in torments, that of becoming the wife of the felon Bianco."

Bailly exhausted himself in arguments and entreaties to dissuade his daughter from her resolve, but in vain; persuasions, threats, all were useless; till, at length, seeing that he was equally resolved with herself not to abandon his project, she began to fear that he would use measures to prevent her from acting as she intended, and thought it more prudent to consent to remain passive in the business for the present, as he agreed to do in respect of the marriage.

"Let us," said Bailly, "afford no room for suspicion

of your real feelings; I will take care that René does not annoy you, but you must consent outwardly to endure his presence. This I command, and I tell you, Alix, in this I will be obeyed for my own sake, as with his power and favour with the Queen, just at this juncture to offend him would be madness."

Alix, with tears, begged her father to believe that she would act in every way so as to avoid causing danger to him, and Bailly, though deeply distressed at the discovery of her heretical opinions, yet hoped that she might be diverted from her meditated act of desperation when time had in some degree softened the poignancy of her affliction.

He had scarcely left her, when, on descending to his apartment, he found the object of their conversation, and of the detestation of his daughter, and found, also, that he owed to him his elevation to the new posts which Catherine had obtained. Confused and distressed, Bailly scarcely knew what course to pursue, and could only throw himself upon the generosity of the Italian, explaining to him that the agitation into which Alix had been thrown had so disordered her nerves, that he could not hope to name an early day for the marriage, but would do all in his power to bring it about as speedily as possible.

He received the command for his daughter to appear at the Italian Theatre with trembling, for he anticipated opposition on her part; and it was with great anxiety that he returned, when René had departed, to tell her of the unwelcome honour, and urge the necessity of compliance. He found her subdued and worn out; and on his assuring her that he would not quit her side during the evening, and would engage Bianco so as to prevent his approaching her, he gained her unwilling consent, and she resolved to endure this new trial with all the firmness of which she was capable.

CHAPTER V.

THE ROCHELLOIS REMONSTRANCE.

" You have beguiled us with a counterfeit
Resembling majesty. You are forsworn — forsworn."
King John.

Although Queen Catherine assumed an appearance of careless indifference, and renewed all the brilliant entertainments to which the late horrible events had put a stop, — though she was more than usually pleasing and familiar, condescending and full of gaiety, — in her secret soul she was as much the prey of doubt, uncertainty, and dread as her vacillating and weak son Charles the Ninth. From every part of the kingdom remonstrances came pouring in against the orders issued; all the well-disposed Catholics in the country heard, as Alix had declared to her father, with horror and affright the murderous commands; and if some had not sufficient courage to resist them, and, overpowered by the arrival of a horde of ruffians to whom the execution of the deed was consigned, allowed their fellow subjects to be butchered, yet others, to their eternal honour, refused to act, and sent back bold denials. Of course, in the Protestant towns, great resistance was expected, and valiantly had they stood against their assailants. The strong town of La Rochelle, in chief, hurled defiance at those who attempted to invade their rights. Catholic and Protestant alike were firm, and a long and fearful struggle was in perspective before the inhabitants could be deceived into concession, or forced into obedience.

Foreign powers also heard with horror of the deed, and sent word by their ambassadors of their disapproval of the measure; and the Queen-mother and her son found themselves the objects of detestation and dislike throughout Europe. The King began to fear that the nomination of his brother to the throne of Poland was far from assured, as the news of the massacre arriving might materially alter the former intentions of that people; and, after all, his hated rival might still be left to torture him with his presence and superior talent.

Letters had been despatched to all the Courts, at first accusing the house of Guise of the troubles; then others, avowing the real authors, and proclaiming the treason of the justly punished Protestants: these contradictory accounts had failed to satisfy any of the powers, or of the resisting towns, and replies both perplexing and vexatious were daily received.

Catherine saw with pleasure the turn which this incident had given to his thoughts, and resolved to improve it to the utmost. Forgetting his hatred of both her and his brother in the new amusement he anticipated, Charles allowed them free entrance to him, and harmony seemed for a time restored.

Meantime the emissaries of Bianco had not been slow to report to him events which had occurred in the prosecution of their cruelties; and his friend the boatman had related the circumstance of Montgomery's escape by swimming over the river, as well as the interference in his favour of a page of the King's. His vigilance was not to be baffled, and he soon discovered that there was something mysterious connected with the new attendant on the nurse, which his sagacity suggested might concern Claude. As soon as his suspicions were roused he resolved to satisfy them, and omit no opportunity of ascertaining if they were well founded.

He communicated to the Queen-mother the fact of Montgomery's escape, which greatly incensed her, as she had pleased her imagination with the hope of having him in her power.

"Your measures were not well taken, René," said she. "What do you tell me of all your friends in Paris, of your troop of newly-arrived Italians who have done such execution, if they allow the chief object of my hatred to elude them? Would I had employed Ruggieri!"

The countenance of René became so livid with passion as she said this, that Catherine repented of having done so, and added soothingly: "Forgive me, my good friend; I am unjust: but you know not what it is to be foiled in such a point, and I had reckoned on your superior skill."

"I know well, Madonna, what it is," replied Réne, re-

covering himself. "I have myself been foiled, and by an accursed Huguenot, one too who dares to be my rival, and who finds protection under this very roof."

"How, René?" returned Catherine, anxious to do away with the effect of her former remarks: "name what I can do for you, and it shall be done."

"The King's nurse," replied he, "has a new attendant, who appeared only on the night of St. Bartholomew. He is kept secretly in her chamber, and securely guarded. He descends not with the other pages, nor is he ever seen about the palace. It was this man who aided the escape of Montgomery, and assaulted my friend, who would have despatched him. This is the person whom I demand; but I presume he is protected by the King, whose heart is strangely tender towards these Huguenots."

"Bianco," said the Queen, "this is my business as well as yours. I will demand of my son who this man is; and before long depend on hearing news of him. The King and his party are preparing to go to a feast given by Nantouillet, the Prévôt of Paris. He meditates some punishment for his lukewarmness in the late affair; but he avoids informing me of the particulars. I fear his imprudence; and, as it is better at this juncture that the citizens should be conciliated, obtain for me what knowledge you can on the subject, that, if need be, I may counteract the effect of his madness."

"Then," said René, "it will be well that your Grace's guards be on the alert; for the King will, I know, commit some strange outbreak. He has engaged a troop of determined men to execute his bidding, but what it is he has not communicated."

"It is well," said the Queen: "take you charge, therefore, and guide some of my guards to the place, that in case of accidents they may be ready. For this service, my dear René, receive my thanks and this purse, and forget my foolish words of anger: they meant nothing."

"I am satisfied, Madonna," replied René; adding mentally, with a sneer, "and will try to execute your commissions as well as if Ruggieri himself undertook them."

Though Catherine did not hear this remark, she judged

by the Italian's face that he had not forgiven her reproach, and she repented having increased his enmity against her new favourite: but it was too late; and from that moment Cosmo was marked as another victim to the fierce jealousy of the Florentine, her worthy countryman.

CHAPTER VI.

THE THEATRE OF GANASSO.

> "Come ho! and wake Diana with a hymn;
> With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,
> And draw her home with music." — SHAKSPEARE.

La Mole, in consequence of the words addressed to René by the Queen-mother, had suddenly conceived a plan which, through the medium of Ruggieri and the Petit Feuillant, he doubted not would answer all his wishes. This was nothing less than to carry off Alix during the confusion of returning from the Theatre of Ganasso. At this period nothing was more common than such enterprises; and continual, although ineffectual, complaints were made by fathers and husbands from whom those dear to them had been taken by force by men of rank.

La Mole arranged with Cosmo, who readily undertook the task, that he should join the President's party, and engage the attention of Bianco: that some persons, placed for the purpose, should excite a sudden tumult, and Alix be separated from her father; when a stratagem should be used, and the Petit Feuillant, having induced her to accompany him, should conduct her to a secure retreat within the walls of the Abbey of St. Germain des Prés, where he at present resided, and where similar asylums were not unfrequently afforded to the favourites of the monks or of the noblemen connected with them.

The morning of that day in which he proposed to take possession of Alix in this summary way, was to be dedicated to the entertainment which the young Queen of Navarre had promised to adorn with her presence, and they

were then to adjourn to the Italians' representation: nothing could therefore be more satisfactory than the whole plan, and the careless and accomplished courtier felt as if he had performed a deed worthy of commendation in having thus provided excitement for himself for some time to come. His beautiful country-house and gardens, situated a little distance without Paris on the river, were to be the scene of the fête champetre, which was to surpass in grace and refinement the coarse glories, as he termed them, of the gorgeous Louvre, and teach the vulgar-minded lovers of pleasure how much their enjoyments can be enhanced by taste.

His house was built on the model of a Venetian villa, and resembled those beautiful constructions, still to be seen occasionally in France, which the times of Francis I. and his successors have left, before the purity of that style was deformed by innovation. The façade was adorned with delicate tracery, and rows of small pointed arcades stretched along its extent. Its halls were of white marble; their sole adornments statues, presenting the most beautiful forms — every thing severe or harsh being carefully excluded, as unfit for a dwelling dedicated entirely to enjoyment. In its saloons were found precious works of art, all perfect in their kind, and few in number: each object was precious rather from its beauty, and the exquisite delicacy of its workmanship and construction, than from its mere richness. A mirror of the largest size yet introduced into France was among the treasures from the hand of the father of Benvenuto. It represented, in a frame of carved wood gilded, Venus and the Loves sculptured in ivory medallions on one side; and on the other, in ebony, a moral lesson was inculcated against the vanity of human pursuits and the evils of coquetry, in a series of similar sized medallions, containing religious subjects. Another, of smaller dimensions, was framed in carved coral by a Spanish master, the inner rims of which were of mother-of-pearl: but one object, which was looked upon as an unique specimen of art, was a small reliquary composed of rock-crystal mixed with chlorite, forming a paste which, while moist, was worked with the point of a diamond into

the most perfect representation of the sacred subject of the Nativity, producing an effect by its beauty and brilliancy little less than magical.

The adornments of his dining-hall were confined to the exquisite works exhibited in every article on the table: — the plates and dishes, all of enamel, chiefly by the great Palizzi; forks and spoons of gold, their handles ornamented with precious stones; cups of rock-crystal and carved ivory; and the meats, served up to the fastidious guests, composed by hands so delicate that the artists deserved to take their rank amongst the highest of those whose performances were, fortunately for their fame, of a less perishable nature.

The gardens sloping down to the river, were left in their native beauty: no festoons of flowers, no extrinsic ornament was introduced; and only one device appeared, and that was predominant, — a silver moon, surmounting a host of stars, glittered over a sylvan pavilion, on which were inscribed the words "*Vince Luna!*" The allusion was not lost upon the gratified Marguerite, whose vanity was greatly pleased by the evident homage offered at her shrine by the most accomplished and handsome cavalier of the day.

Ronsard was the only poet admitted; as La Mole rightly judged that by this means the harmony would certainly not be disturbed by the jealousy of rivals contending for supremacy.

After the repast, as the guests strayed along the alleys of flowers and through the groves, a concealed concert of flutes and other soft instruments announced the arrival of a gilded bark, from which issued sixteen ladies, clad in the different costumes of the various provinces of France, who each in turn executed a dance peculiar to her country, accompanied by the music adapted to it. The fair Poitevine danced with graceful sprightliness to the tones of the *cornemuse;* the Provençale, the *volte,* to the sound of the *timballe;* the Bourguignone and the Champenoise, to that of the small *hautbois dessus de violon,* and *tabourins de village;* and the Bretones delighted the company by their rapid and spirited dances, called *passe-pieds* and *branles gaies.*

Nymphs and sylvans then appeared, who performed a ballet which had been composed by the Princess herself: and after some other entertainments, when the waning day told them that the hours were flying, a fleet of fairy boats drew up beneath the lawns, into which the whole gay party stepping, were towed along by two large gilded barges, under whose melodious guidance they arrived at the Tuileries; from whence, after a time, they adjourned to the theatre, to which, as a matter of policy, the public were allowed entrance, although at first the intention had been to dedicate it entirely to the amusement of the Court. This arrangement had been recommended by La Mole as soon as he had fixed upon the notable plan, which this would render easier of execution.

The *salle* of the *Jeu de Paume* had been fitted up with becoming taste, and attention to convenience. A temporary gallery answered the purpose of boxes, and the pit was resigned to the general audience. The Queen-mother sat surrounded by her "dames de la petite bande," as the beauties were called, over whom she loved to preside; the young King of Navarre was near her, and busily engaged in earnest conversation with the artful and fascinating Madame de Sauves, who appeared to absorb all his attention, and was using all her efforts to confirm the effect her beauty had evidently produced on his too pliant mind. The Duke of Alençon, his friend, stood at a distance with a gloomy dissatisfied air, to which jealousy lent an additional shade; for he saw with vexation that the fair coquette, whom he also admired, had no smiles that evening to bestow on any but the young Béarnais.

Charles IX. was in great and excited spirits, and talked incessantly; all his natural vivacity and gaiety appearing in full vigour, without apparently a cloud to disturb the sunshine of his pleasure. The Duke of Anjou, or, as he should rather be now called, the King of Poland elect, was in the train of his sister Marguerite, attached to the seat of the Princess de Condé, as if he had there taken root: his whole soul beamed in his eyes as he spoke to her in a low, passionate tone; and she listened with a countenance which too well told her husband, who gloomily regarded

the pair, how much she felt, and with what delight she drank in those honeyed words, so dangerous and so dear. But Condé's thoughts were far away; he was brooding over the misery of his Protestant friends, and dreaming of the possibility of affording them relief. His lovely wife was nothing to him, and her affections he neither sought nor regarded. He classed her with all the rest of the coquettes at a court which he considered as profligate as it was cruel, and his only desire was to escape from the thraldom of a marriage he detested. Had he heard the words uttered by Henry of Anjou, he would have thought the time of his emancipation not far distant.

"Beloved Marie!" whispered the royal lover, "of what use is this reserve. I know, I feel that I am dear to you; although your love does not, I fear, approach by a thousand degrees the adoration with which my heart glows for you. Tell me not that there is sin or shame in such love as mine: your happiness, your honour is all my care. This fatal marriage can be dissolved. I have an inward conviction that my power in France will ere long be unlimited; then, Marie, what shall prevent your being mine? — what shall oppose our happiness? Only let me hear from your own lips that you will hail the accomplishment of this wish as warmly as I shall."

"Henry," whispered the young Princess, "I entreat you, urge me not. I have confessed far too much. I would fain have had you depart to this desolate kingdom without bearing with you the knowledge of that which can give no joy to either you or me. Deceive not yourself: we are separated fatally! Alas! you must go; and what can be my fate but to die here, a neglected, wretched creature, lost to every joy on earth, and seeing nothing in the future but despair?"

"Marie," returned the Prince, "I will give up this hateful crown of Poland. I will go to my tyrant brother and tell him, no power shall force me to abandon France. I will brave Condé to his face, and make him do me justice, and give you up. — I will ——"

"Hold! Henry; dearest Henry!" cried the terrified Marie: "think of my danger, my disgrace; and, if you

really love me, be calm, and act not in a manner which would ruin us for ever."

"Then," said he, "give me your promise. I swear, nothing but that will prevent me from doing some desperate act. Promise to live for me alone; never to be another's; to consider yourself my wife, my own, before the face of Heaven! and, when I come to claim you, be ready to redeem your pledge. Nothing shall prevent this. I will endure all that Fate may impose upon me, — absence, misery, disappointment, — so you are my reward at last.

"I never loved but you," sobbed Marie, overcome with his vehemence: "no other can I ever love. Condé demands nothing of me: he hates me for the part my friends have taken. I was forced upon him, and I cannot injure him by this promise. Take it then, my beloved; in life and death I am yours alone!"

They started: the same sound they had once heard before in similar circumstances seemed whispering near them, and the last words she had uttered were repeated in a hollow echo, — "in death alone!"

Renée de Châteauneuf, brilliant in beauty and radiant in dress, marked the interview of the lovers, and looked on with envy and despite. "I have then lost him," said she; "he has broken my chains: but he shall not wear those of another so easily as he imagines. The Queen-mother shall know of this, and judge if Marie de Cleves is a fitting person for her son's future queen." She beckoned to her side Renè Bianco, and then ensued a long conversation between them, full of import. When the Italian took leave of her, he sought the Queen-mother; and long and serious was the conference between them, the nature of which future events too well explained.

Marguerite of Navarre meantime saw in what manner her husband's attention was engaged, and a reckless feeling of despair took possession of her mind.

"He loves me not: he never will love the wife whom he led to the altar amidst the carnage of his friends. My sight is odious to him!" she exclaimed mentally; "but I thought him incapable of loving at all; and I forgave

the harshness and coldness of his nature! What now do I see? He is pouring out his heart at the feet of a woman, worthless and abandoned; and I am contemned, abhorred, neglected, insulted, for her! See how he gazes on her! he has no eyes for any thing else! he stoops to pick up her glove! he bends towards her! he kisses her fingers! and this in my sight! Ha! her bold glance turns this way! she speaks to him of me! He smiles: it is a smile of contempt! How can he listen to my name from her? How dares she breathe it? Wretch that I am to watch and dote on that which is my torment!"

While these thoughts passed in the mind of Marguerite, no outward signs told of their existence: she appeared to be listening to the flattery of the handsome La Mole, who, seated at her feet, uttered all that the overstrained gallantry of the day allowed, and ventured as far as prudence could permit to exhibit the vain feeling which he called love in his words and looks. The smiles and sparkling glances of the Princess, — her quick replies, her animated laughter, — her sudden changes from gay to grave, — and all the efforts she was making to conceal what passed in her mind, deceived the courtier into a conviction that he was heard with pleasure, and he triumphed in idea over the rest of the crowd of adorers on whom the Princess deigned not to waste a thought.

"Ah! your Grace," sighed the beautiful Madame de Sauves to Henry of Navarre, "how can you try to deceive me with such vows, — you who are the husband of the most admired Princess in Europe, — one for whom all our gallants are dying!"

"She cannot compare with you," said Henry. "Besides, what is Marguerite to me? We are equally indifferent to each other, and neither of us are of a jealous turn."

"I would not believe that of any but the Queen," replied De Sauves tenderly: "but all the world knows of an attachment she had before she saw your Grace; therefore, perhaps, she may be indeed indifferent on your account."

"I have never inquired about the state of her heart," said Henry carelessly: "it is of yours I ask now."

"Oh! the Duke de Guise, you know well enough, is her acknowledged lover; though now, of course, he must marry the Princess de Portien. D'Entragues' reign did not last long — poor fellow! I am obliged to smile on him myself, lest he should break his heart."

"Is she indeed such a coquette?" asked Henry with a slight frown.

De Sauves laughed. "This is too simple," she replied; "why, we all know her coquetry, and learn from her how to treat our lovers; it is the fashion of the Court in Paris. To be sure, this last passion of the Queen's is charmingly romantic. You have seen, perhaps, her Endymion: I am told she adores him. It is quite Arcadian."

Henry listened with astonishment to history after history, which the artful beauty related to the disadvantage of Marguerite, in so wild, witty, and natural a manner, that there appeared no evil intention in the amusing stories. She mixed with this scandal adventures of other beauties of the Court, and succeeded perfectly in riveting the charmed attention of the inexperienced Prince, who, much younger than herself, felt flattered to be treated as a confidant by a woman so well acquainted with the world, and so fascinating, as his gay companion. For the first time since his mother's death his spirits appeared to recover their elasticity, and his mind awoke to the dangerous charm of one of the most designing sirens of the Court in which he was compelled to live.

"Henceforth," said he to himself, "I will not venture to judge of these apparently innocent creatures who conceal so much cunning. This shall be my lovely guide, and I shall be too happy under her care. As for my wife, I was mistaken in her, I thought she had a heart; but, at all events, it is not for me. Her prayers saved my life; but that was mere humanity. She is no better than the rest; besides, she is the daughter of Catherine!"

A shudder passed over him as he thought this; and he turned again to the lively De Sauves, to lose the recollections which were beginning to banish his temporary gaiety.

The Florentines acquitted themselves in a manner to deserve the applause which was showered upon them.

"These actors shall have a theatre of their own immediately," said the King. "What a fortunate chance that their petition reached us, otherwise we might have lost the most delightful recreation in the world through the stupidity of my wise parliament, who are all such dolts that their souls cannot comprehend what is worthy. Listen to the voice of that Italian. Mort Dieu! it is ravishing: he shall be paid with a purse of gold as soon as the scene is over. How this exalts the mind and soothes the feelings! all care is soon forgotten in these sounds."

During the whole of the performance Alix sat in passive endurance by her father's side, taking no interest in what was going on; her mind wandering amongst gloomy images and fearful scenes. The shrill tones of the actors sounded in her ears like the shrieks of victims, — their plaintive notes like the entreaties of her dying and supplicating countrymen: in the blaze of lights she saw the torches of infuriate vengeance, — and in the glare of jewels, the steel of the destroyer. The theatre swam round, the actors and auditors were confusedly presented to her view, and she remained in a state of almost unconscious suffering, with a vague idea that she was fastened to a stake, and a crowd of torturers surrounding her.

Bianco watched her with minute attention, and exerted every art to oblige her to regard him with at least an appearance of interest. Her beauty, which had first attracted him, had now less influence than before. He saw that he was considered by her with dislike from the beginning of their acquaintance; but he was now quite aware that he was detested and feared, and by every feeling of mortified self-love which he experienced he vowed to effect a revenge deep and tyrannous. He felt she was in his power; for her father had yielded to his avarice and ambition, and was won to his purpose. His powerful patroness seconded his own wishes; and the unhappy girl herself was entirely helpless, and without a friend to rescue her from his machinations.

Finding that all his efforts were unavailing to make

Alix put on a semblance which should deceive the world, René affected to be forced from her side by the necessity of attending to the Queen; but as he passed to and fro, near or at a distance, Alix felt the chill of his serpent eyes upon her as she sat speechless and immovable, fascinated by the spell they seemed to cast over her.

It was the mode at this period for the audience in the pit to amuse themselves, before the performance began, and between the acts, — a space somewhat long, — with games of dice and cards, songs and conversation; nor did they forget to season their diversion with refreshment of various kinds. Dried sweetmeats and comfits were thrown about in profusion, and were also cast up, and returned to and from, the elevated and separated seats occupied by the superior class of visitors. Into the boxes of the Queen-mother, and the Queen of Navarre, were showered numerous missives of this kind, enclosed in which were lines of a complimentary nature; though it sometimes happened that severe satire and bitter censure were concealed in these apparently friendly greetings.

Blushes and smiles generally followed the opening of these mysterious presents; and speculations and guesses were made as to the probable author and sender, which occasioned much mirth and coquettish remark. In one might be found a stanza to this purpose:

> "Though richly shrin'd thy beauties seem
> In gems that worldlings prize,
> I cannot see thy diamonds gleam,
> So dazzling are thine eyes."

In another:

> "Come no more where I may view thee,
> Lest thy glances quite undo me, —
> Or remain, and let me gaze
> Till I perish in their blaze."

Amongst a shower which reached the feet of the Queen of Navarre, she opened one containing this compliment, in allusion to one of the titles given her by her admirers of "La Lune:"

> "Wherefore prize we sunny Day,
> If he chase the Moon away?
> Surely daylight comes too soon,
> Banishing the lovely Moon!"

A sweet and clear voice was heard from amongst the

crowd below to sing beneath the box of the fair Marguerite a wild strain, the words of which were as follow:

"I'd seek thee, and find thee, and call thee my own,
Although thou wert hidden in regions unknown,
Where never the sun-light
Thy home might betray,
But the glow-worm each summer night
Lends thee thy day,—
Where sometimes the gossamer,
Passing thee by,
Waves her frail pennon
Along the blue sky,—
But where not the smallest bird
Ventures to hover,
And not e'en the moth can
Thy dwelling discover;
Yet there, though so secret, so still, so alone,
I'd seek thee, sweet fairy, and make thee my own!"

The Queen-mother opened one of the sugared secrets thrown to her by an unknown hand, and a shade passed over her countenance as she read:

TRES Erebi FURIAS ne posthac credite vates,
Addita nam QUARTA est nunc Catherina TRIBUS;
Quod si TRES FURIAS à se dimitteret Orcus,
Hæc Catherina foret, PRO TRIBUS UNA satis.

The Count de Retz, who observed the expression of his mistress's face, laid his hand on his sword, and exclaimed,

"Madam, your Grace is insulted!—let me seek out the traitor!"

"No, no, De Retz," answered the Queen, recovering herself instantly. "We shall do what *we* please; let them say what *they* please. The praise or blame of the million is of little consequence. One is their idol one day, and their demon the next. Those who are moved by their breath are but light and vain: for myself, I regard it not."

As she spoke, another missive reached her, which it required some philosophy to peruse without considerable vexation:

* "The difference would you have me tell
'Twixt Catherine and Jezebel,—
The one for Israel's ruin sent,
The other France's punishment:
The first was fraught with every evil,
The last yields only to the devil.
On Jezebel Heaven's wrath was driven,
And to the dogs her carcass given:

* *Published* and *disseminated* at the time.

As dark a fate just Heaven may send —
But there the parallel must end;
From Catherine's infected clay
The famish'd dogs would turn away!"

Catherine tore the paper into fragments, and turned her eyes towards the stage, for at this moment the act recommenced; and, though nothing outwardly told the torture of her heart, within was burning an unceasing fire. She felt that she had done a deed which had for ever sealed her fate with the people of France, — that she was hated, abhorred, and loaded with the curses of all the best portion of the subjects of her son.

At length, amidst applause and great apparent delight, the play was ended, and the audience began to disperse. René was standing close to the Queen-mother, and was just about to quit her to seek the President's party, when Ruggieri whispered something to Catherine, which caused her to make some inquiries of both; and René was obliged uneasily to remain in attendance. Meantime, Alix, anxious to escape his attentions, urged her father to hasten their departure. The people pressed forward to behold the exit of the royal party; and several men coming suddenly from the pit as Bailly, with his daughter on his arm, was advancing, rudely pushed against them, and they were separated in a moment. Alix was borne along by the crowd till she reached the street, and the President struggled in vain to rejoin her. A friendly voice addressed him, exclaiming,

"This way, sir: the young lady is in perfect safety. This way: shall I lead you to her?"

He instantly followed the speaker, who led him to a side-door, while Alix, much alarmed, was calling to him in the crowd; but her voice was drowned by the shouts of a party near her, and the rush and confusion of the people striving to get forward.

"What shall I do!" cried she. "Will no one afford me their protection for a few moments?"

At her exclamation a person stepped towards her, and in a mild voice entreated her to be calm.

"Is it possible," said he, with surprise, "that I behold the daughter of the President Bailly? I came to seek

you; for I saw him but now asking if you had been seen."

Alix looked up, and, though she did not recognise the person who spoke, she observed that he wore a clerical habit, though of somewhat singular fashion. His countenance was full of benevolent anxiety, and the tone of his voice was encouraging and soft.

"Delay not, dear madam," he said. "The President will be most uneasy till you are restored to him." Without the slightest hesitation Alix presented him her hand. "Follow me, madam," hurriedly exclaimed her protector. "The royal entrance is safe from interruption, and I have fortunately the power of passing you that way."

The Petit Feuillant, for her zealous cavalier was no other, led her on through an opposite passage, and in a few minutes they were in the open air; but scarcely did she feel the breeze revive her fainting spirits before she was forcibly seized and hurried onwards, while a veil tightly drawn over her head prevented her attempt to utter cries from being of any avail. She felt that she was lifted into some vehicle, and was borne along by horses at full speed, but whither she could not conjecture.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THREE KINGS.

"And the three Kings with all their companie." — *Ship of Fools.*

The Prévôt Nantouillet having in vain endeavoured, with as good a grace as possible, to excuse himself from the visit of the three Kings, who proposed to honour his hotel with their presence, was obliged at length to make preparations for their reception.

While he was in the midst of occupations which would have caused him no little pride a few weeks previously, it was announced to him that a party of the young clerks of the Chambre des Comptes, amongst whom was a relation of his own, desired to pay their respects to him.

"They come," said Nantouillet, "at an inconvenient moment; but, however, I cannot refuse them: let them enter."

Accordingly the party appeared, and greeted him with vociferous exclamations of friendship; congratulating him on the honour that he was about to attain, and entreating that they might be allowed some corner from whence to see the sight. They professed that their conduct should be so orderly and proper that no one should even discover that they were on the spot; and, if the Prévôt pleased, they would act as attendants, to do honour to the occasion. At first Nantouillet laughed at their importunities; but at length it was settled that about ten of the oldest of the clerks should appear on the evening in question, and act as a guard of honour in the halls where the festivities were to take place, when they would have an opportunity of beholding all the royal and noble guests to their infinite satisfaction.

"So be it, then," said he, good-humouredly; "it is something to have so many crowned heads under one's roof. — Why, Philippe, you are yourself King of the Bazoche this year."

"No, uncle," answered the young man; "I am only ex-king: we have elected a capital fellow, he and the Emperor of Galilee are to have a feast the same night as yours; perhaps you would like them to look in on your revels?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried Nantouillet, "it would be far from my wish; every thing in my house must be conducted with order, — no riots, — no noisy revelling, — all dignified and graceful. You will see, my young friends, a little of Court manners that night, and I trust you will study them; for you of the city are too apt to be boisterous in your merriment, and riotous in your frolics. I will show you what the mirth and hilarity of gentlemen is."

"We are but clerks," said Philippe; "but we contrive to amuse ourselves just as well. However, we will mend our manners, and take pattern by the Court gallants, whom you so much admire."

"Well said, my good boys," returned the Prévôt. "Now go to Marion, and see that she treats you well, and

fail not to come at the appointed time. I will have dresses suitable for you; and, please the Virgin! we shall have a brave night of it."

Highly gratified with this permission, the young men parted from their indulgent friend, and returned to their companions, to whom they made known their good fortune, much to the envy of those who were not to be of the party; the good cheer they were sure to find at the Prévôt's not being amongst the least attractive circumstances named. A great deal was said amongst them which led to a variety of conclusions, the result of which afterwards appeared.

At last the evening, looked for with so many different emotions, arrived, and the Hôtel d'Hercule was prepared in all its splendour for the great occasion; which though its giver dreaded, yet it was not without a certain agreeable feeling of pride that he beheld the gorgeousness of his dwelling; and he tried to banish all unpleasant recollections, that he might do proper honour to his guests, in spite of presentiments which were, he reflected, after all, probably vain imaginings.

"These courtiers," said he, are proud and arrogant: but still they would not be likely to injure me in the main. King Charles is vindictive; but what have I done to incur his anger? The King of Poland I am not so sure of; he owes me a grudge for refusing his mistress for a wife. La Belle Châteauneuf is a lovely creature; but — but — not in my way by any means. I wonder why Henry of Anjou wants to get rid of her? — it can be only a feint; but I am not such a fool as to make myself a convenient husband to any of these fine gallants. As for Navarre, poor fellow! there is no harm in him; he hasn't much spirit either for good or bad: and for the rest — oh! it's idle to be afraid; and, after all, it *is* a great honour."

Satisfying his mind thus, he bustled about, full of importance, and reviewed his preparations with extreme complacency; disposing all in the most approved manner, and taking care that nothing was wanting to render the effect as perfect as possible.

The large outer court of the house was lighted by torches of white and coloured wax, supported by gilded

figures surrounding the whole space. In the centre of the building was a magnificent double flight of steps of white marble, which projected far into the court, and conducted to the grand entrance. These steps were adorned with shrubs and flowers in profusion, and birds of gaudy plumage were placed in golden cages amongst them. Crystal lamps were hung from every balcony and window: and draperies of rich tapestry were held by allegorical figures above every portal, whose intrinsic beauty of architecture needed no other ornament. The great hall was esteemed one of the finest in Paris; it was of immense length and width, and was divided in the centre by a range of slender columns of different-coloured marble, so as to form two separate divisions. All round the hall ran arcades of Saracenic form supporting an open gallery which blazed with light, and where musicians were placed ready to welcome the royal party, and to perform during the repast. From this hall opened immense doors, displaying a suite of chambers richly decorated, and containing treasures of art and taste, rare mirrors, precious emeralds, splendid cabinets, and pictures, whose value was enormous.

There were two large recesses at the upper end of the great hall, in which was displayed the great wealth of Nantouillet, and that portion of his possessions of which he was most peculiarly vain. This was a huge mass of gold and silver plate—cups, vases, urns, dishes, candelabra, saltcellars, and vessels without number, all of value scarcely to be imagined, as most of them were the work of Cellini and his pupils, and had been collected at an enormous charge by the father of the Prévôt and himself.

The tables where the repast was to be served were ranged along the inner hall, and blazed with plate of equal richness to that on the buffets: the boards were covered with cloths called *tabliers ouvrés*, adorned with open work, of great rarity, of oriental patterns, fabricated at Troyes. The *hanap*, a covered cup, used at this period, and for several centuries previous, holding choice wine, spiced, was placed in the centre of the principal table. The enamelled gold, of which it was made, was of the purest description, and its execution was the work of the celebrated Jean Courtois of Limoges

Servants in glittering liveries lined the passages, and stood at the foot of the stairs which led to the galleries round, from whence opened other chambers, all fitted up with great splendour. Nothing in short that money could procure was neglected, and much did the assembled friends of Nantouillet laud the appearance of all. These friends consisted only of two city dignitaries and their ladies; the number was so small, as the principal guests were those expected to accompany the King.

The young clerks were habited as pages, in white dresses, and took their station near the entrance of the great hall.

As soon as the royal party was seen approaching, the musicians began their performances, and trumpets and clarions announced the arrival of King Charles, the King of Poland, and the King of Navarre, with about twenty noblemen and gentlemen of their train, and a great many of the guards of each, who remained in a lower hall, where they were to be entertained in a suitable manner.

The ladies who accompanied the royal visitors were three in number only: these were all women celebrated at the time both for their beauty and the irregularity of their lives. The first was Renée de Rieux, called La Belle Châteauneuf, whose chains the King of Poland elect had worn, though he was now desirous of shaking them off, and his design in bringing her to the house of the rich Prévôt was twofold, first to dazzle him with her beauty, and next to dazzle her with his gold, as he hoped by this means to get her off his own hands, as she greatly interfered with his present passion for the Princess de Condé.

The beautiful Châteauneuf boasted the finest form, the most exquisite complexion and hair, of any of the beauties of the Court. Her eyes were full of fire and spirit, yet had softness at will, which could fascinate the coldest heart: her temper was arrogant, violent, and vindictive, and her morals of the most equivocal order.

The second lady was La Baronne de Sauves, whose beauty and whose character were equally acknowledged and notorious with that of her companion.

The third was of humbler rank, but her present position placed her for a time on an equality with the others, as her extreme loveliness might well entitle her to expect. Her face was a full oval, her eyes lively and finely cut, her forehead small, her nose exquisitely proportioned, her mouth like a rose-bud, and her figure petite and perfect in its symmetry: but her principal charm was her gaiety and grace, and the wit and vivacity of her conversation, so that she was generally considered worthy of the anagram which had been made from her name of Marie Touchet — *Je charme tout.*

Fascinating as these ladies were, their characters were so well known both at Court and in the city, that their coming, unaccompanied by any of those of higher condition, with whom they, at least the two first, were from their rank associated, was not a circumstance which appeared very flattering to the Prévôt, and the style of assumption of his relative Marie, who treated him with the same air of hauteur as the others, nettled and annoyed him.

"Well, Nantouillet," said the fair De Sauves, "you receive us with the air of a finished courtier. Truly, in general, you of the bourgeoisie do not consider the difference of taste sufficiently which our relative positions by the river give. There is as much variety as in the various provinces: those of the Tuileries are the singing birds, while those of the town are the sparrows and crows of society."

"The Prévôt," said De Châteauneuf, "is quite a courtier: he has derived his fine manners from the very walls of his château: the Montgomery would be quite shamed could he return to see the present inmate."

"But, pray," exclaimed La Touchet, "present your fair friends to us; we long to make their acquaintance."

Nantouillet, scarcely knowing whether civility or impertinence was intended, hastened to name the two wives of his friends, as Madame Toutevoye and Madame Mellet. The ladies, with great formality, returned the overstrained compliments of the fashionable guests whose bold looks and feigned admiration disconcerted them not a little.

"Holy saints!" cried La Touchet, "what a lovely dress you have on, Madame Voirtout. This *vertugadin* is worth a journey to behold, for a lover of antiquity. How becoming it must have been to your respectable mother in her gala days! Could you oblige me with the pattern? it would make my fortune at Court."

"But, Madame Mellet," exclaimed the King, "what exquisite *pattins* you wear; they are positively a foot high. Touchet, those *pianelles* of yours make you look like a mere dwarf; you must positively have shoes that will give you the majesty of our city ladies, which is really quite remarkable."

Madame Mellet blushed and smiled, much gratified at the compliment; while the pretty Marie put forth her tiny foot, covered with a low shoe of embroidered stuff, with flat heels, and exhibited her tight silk stocking, then a new and esteemed fashion. She pouted and turned her back on Charles; then suddenly whirling round several times, stopped her graceful little figure before the astonished city ladies, and threw herself into the attitude of a figure dancer; while her friends tittered and applauded, and the Prévôt looked on with dismay, feeling certain that some plan had been concerted to annoy his female friends.

The gentlemen of the party, besides the royal guests, were most of them famous as leaders of fashion, and known to be the most unscrupulous and daring young cavaliers in that licensed Court. When the Prévôt observed the Sieur De Quelus, Riberac, St. Mesgrin, Maugiron, D'Entragues, Chomberg, Livarot, Du Guast, Bussy d'Amboise, D'O, La Mole, Coconnas, and others, he trembled for the propriety of his entertainment, and wished it fairly at an end.

This troop of gay gallants began with extreme familiarity to examine all the adornments of the house, the plate, and furniture, and pictures, and all appeared to excite pleasurable sensations in their minds; so that the vanity of the host was so much gratified that he forgave the want of ceremony which permitted them to amuse themselves by whispers and shouts of laughter every now and then. By degrees poor Nantouillet began to feel him-

self happy and ready to offer every amusement in his power to his obliging visitors; but ever and anon would come a misgiving that all was not right, and the alternation kept him in a state of fidgety agitation.

The young King of Navarre and the Duke of Anjou were at first grave and taciturn; but their natural spirits prevailed in a short time, and they appeared as gay and inquisitive as the rest.

"Marie," said King Charles, "we stand on no ceremony here: you shall be our hostess and I will act as host myself; therefore, good Nantouillet, bestir, for we mean to enjoy ourselves to the full extent of the powers of the Hôtel d'Hercule. Bring some wine, and let us drink to the high heels and great petticoats of our good city of Paris."

Nantouillet presented the wine to the King on his knees, and Charles insisting on the same ceremony being gone through to the pretty Touchet, she accepted the honour with mock dignity, and the cup went round merrily. The repast was then served amidst the clamorous congratulations of the guests, and the Prévôt began to think that the recommendation he had given to his young friends of the Chambre des Comptes was not altogether judicious; for more noise and confusion he had seldom heard at the most boisterous city meeting.

The King seemed to take a spiteful pleasure in harassing Nantouillet, who stood behind his chair, — now begging for one thing, now entreating for another, now directing the attention of his friends to some omission, then overwhelming his host with hyperbolical compliments, which elicited great laughter from all present. The Court ladies entered fully into the hilarity of the scene; but the two dames of the city occasionally cast uneasy glances towards their husbands, who they saw were becoming elevated with the repeated bumpers forced upon them. But their discomfiture became complete when the King proposed that another cup should go round to the health of the ladies, and that a kiss from each should be granted to all claimants.

Madame Toutevoye grew red and pale, and Madame

Mellet signed to her husband to interfere. That worthy was, however, so joyously disposed, that he disregarded all hints; but Toutevoye, a remarkably short fat man, with a very red face, rose to represent that the ladies of the city were not accustomed to this style of manners, and in their name he begged to decline the honour intended.

"Answer for yourself, vieux jaloux," exclaimed D'O. "Do you suppose either of these lovely creatures will object when royalty commands? Sit down; interrupt not the festivity by your impertinent observations, or you shall be shut up in yonder coffer till you learn better manners."

This threat caused much merriment, and Toutevoye was obliged to submit, as were the ladies, who endured the obstreperous gallantry as they best might. No one but Charles, however, ventured to salute Marie, till La Mole, with marked effrontery, approached and insisted on claiming his right. Marie laughingly consented, but observed in an instant that the effect her compliance had on her royal lover was far from that produced by a mere joke: his face became livid with rage, and his eyes yellow and distended. La Mole, proud of his triumph, did not observe the glance of fury sent after him as he lounged back to his seat.

In the confusion which prevailed the two city ladies contrived to slip from the chamber, and gaining the outer hall and the court called for their attendants, and quitted the house unperceived. Their departure was not at first noticed; but when it was, much clamour ensued, and their husbands were called upon to apologise for their conduct.

"Messire Toutevoye," cried the King of Poland, "you must answer this — we are aggrieved. Your brother Sheriff does not appear quite able to address us; but of you we demand an explanation of this desertion."

Toutevoye attempted to rise, but found himself so unsteady that he preferred keeping his seat, and, after several inarticulate attempts to speak, gave up the defence.

"Let us take care of the good Sheriff," cried several voices.

"D'O, you recommended yonder coffer; methinks it would just hold him," cried Henry of Navarre.

"Excellent!" exclaimed one of the guests. "In with him!—never mind the key! It is locked, but this dagger is just as good."

So saying, a dagger was applied to the lock of a large chest in the chamber, in spite of the remonstrances of Nantouillet.

"Gentlemen — sire — they will spoil my fine coffer; it is of great price — and my good friend Toutevoye will be smothered. For pity's sake, do not put him in there! — he is too fat! — he will be killed!"

But they cared little for his exclamations, or the faint struggles of the almost insensible Sheriff, who was thrust into the coffer; and as the hinges of the lid had been wrested off, they proceeded to tear down some of the fine hangings, and stuffing them into it likewise, completely covered the unlucky dignitary, whom they left, with every chance of being stifled, in his unexpected retreat.

"Now," cried Charles, who appeared greatly excited, "let us prove to our good Prévôt how much we appreciate the welcome he has given us, and finish the evening with some gambols which he will not easily forget."

"Well said, my royal brother," cried the King of Poland. "Shall I teach him to play at bilboquet? I am acknowledged the best hand in France. Here, D'Entragues, reach me that toy. It will exactly answer my purpose."

"Hold, hold!" screamed Nantouillet. "It is my famous watch of Geneva, worth a king's ransom. What are you going to do with it, in heaven's name?"

"You shall see," replied the king elect, at the same time seizing the large watch, and throwing it in the air as he held under it a rich enamelled cup.

"A miss! a miss!" cried the courtiers, as the heavy watch descended, smashing the cup to atoms, and falling on the table amongst crystal and china, demolishing all in its course.

"I am undone;" cried Nantouillet, wringing his hands. "Grebau's masterpiece! — such another does not exist in France!"

"Oh!" cried D'Entragues, "the reason his Grace

failed is, that he forgot to fasten his bilboquet with a chain. That you wear, Prevôt, will just serve."

As he spoke he made a spring at the Prévôt, and catching at the gold chain he wore, slipped it over his head as dexterously as possible.

"Par la mort Dieu!" cried Charles, "no tireur de laine could have succeeded better. Give the chain to la dame de ses pensées, la belle Renée."

Renée de Châteauneuf took the chain with laughter, and placed it round her beautiful neck. "You shall be my slave in spite of yourself," said she, "though I am forced to wear your chains."

"Alas!" said De Sauves, "has the Prévôt no trifle to spare for me, or Marie, his own relation; he is so brave that his glittering rings and brooches excite our envy."

"They are yours," said Charles. "Prévôt, those rings will best suit these fair fingers. Present them straight, and do honour to your breeding."

"Nay," said the suffering host, "this is beyond bearing. My family jewels ——"

"Family of an old apothecary! an old money-lender!" screamed the courtiers. "Confusion to all misers! Give up the jewels straight! Despoil the traitor!"

This order was quickly obeyed, and the gems transferred to the lively fair ones, who, thus furnished, received whispering instructions from their jocose friends, and taking leave of Nantouillet with exceeding ceremony, were conducted to their litters, and took their way to their respective domiciles, laden with the spoil won for them by their zealous champions.

No sooner were they departed than a general uproar ensued; every guest produced a mask from his pocket, with which he covered his face.

"Now, bons garçons!" cried Charles, "we are all alike: a mask tells no tales, and we are free to help ourselves to the Prévôt's presents, which, like a loyal subject, he offers for our acceptance."

In an instant every part of the house was ransacked; with incredible speed they took possession of the piles of plate; the tables and seats were overturned in every di-

rection ; as many as possible of the lights extinguished ; and, in spite of the resistance of the few who opposed them, valuables of every description were thrown from the windows to men beneath, who made off with them instantly ; pictures were torn from the walls ; statues demolished ; china dashed to atoms ; caskets and boxes carried away ; chests broken open, and emptied of their contents ; money and jewels scrambled for, and the pillage of the Hôtel d'Hercule complete.

In the midst of this chaos a party of the most active had seized Nantouillet, and bound him to one of the pillars in his own hall, piling round him broken seats, tables, and various fragments of furniture. From this elevated position he could behold the destruction going on, while his loud cries were drowned in the noise and clamour which accompanied the frantic mirth of his royal and noble guests. His band of attendant clerks had opposed as much as possible the desolation going on, and his servants had exerted themselves against the masked delinquents, but a reinforcement of their own people from below had greatly increased their forces, and disorder appeared to have gained the day.

The unfortunate Prévôt made the most desperate efforts to free himself, and had succeeded in extricating one arm, when a mask rushed forwards, and called in a voice which he could not mistake, " Mort Dieu ! it were glorious to set fire to the martyr's pile. Maugiron ! D'O ! bring me a torch ! "

This suggestion appeared to give great satisfaction, and several ran to execute the commission, when a mask coming behind him cut the cord with which the Prévôt was bound, and he leaped down upon the man who had given this counsel, dealing him blows of no very gentle nature, while his deliverer stood by, apparently much entertained. They struggled and pommelled each other for some time, till at length the incendiary mask was fairly thrust down amongst the broken furniture, and but for his friends would have fared but ill from the infuriated Nantouillet, on whom an empty chest and a mutilated form were cast by his rescuers ; who dragging forth their companion, rushed off to assist in the pillage of a cabinet

of jewels, the doors of which their daggers were demolishing.

As the Prévôt lay panting on the ground, a voice near him, almost stifled with merriment, exclaimed, "Téte bleue! Prévôt, lose no time, or they will be back, and you will be made a saint and martyr of in spite of your struggles."

"Wretch!" cried Nantouillet, "thief, — vagabond that you are, how can I rise with all this lumber upon me?"

"Prévôt," said the first speaker, "I do not want to harm you. Take my advice, and fly. I will help you to escape."

"What! and leave my house to the mercy of these ruffians? Your advice tells what you are, and I will not leave you without your share of the chastisement your gang of robbers deserves."

So saying, the Prévôt flew at the mask, who had dragged away some of the furniture, and afforded him a means of rising, and, regardless of his expostulations, began to load him with blows and abuse. He found, however, that his adversary did not attempt to return his strokes, but, parrying them, continued to laugh and call out,

"You are beating a friend, Prévôt. Cap de Dieu! don't stand pommelling me thus; but look to your safety, or it will be too late. You have been villanously treated. I will repair my part some day, if it please my good stars. I will stay here, and prevent their setting the hotel on fire. Make your way out, and call your friends together. I hear a noise and scuffle without. Hence! without a word more."

Nantouillet thought he could do no better than follow this advice; and leaving his unknown friend, whom by his Gascon accent he began to imagine was no stranger, he darted off to the outer court, where he beheld some of the young clerks contending with the other party.

"Courage, Nantouillet!" cried one of them, "friends are not far off. Bid your people resist a little longer, and we shall foil them yet."

At this moment a party of the Queen's guards were

seen advancing to the gates, which were left open by those who were bearing off their ill-gotten treasures, and an order was given in the Queen's name that the confusion should cease. Some of the most active of the rioters pressed past the guard, who seemed but lukewarm in their defence, and others rushed back to those within the house, to inform them of the sudden interruption. While the two parties were violently contesting their several rights, — and in the meantime the property of the Prévôt suffered from both, — a cry was heard from the clerks, which was answered by one without, and the court, the halls, the corridors, the whole building was filled with men armed with sticks and staves, bludgeons, and weapons of all descriptions, who called as they rushed along, "A nous les amis! à la rescousse! voici l'Empereur de Galilée! voici le Roi de la Bazoche!"

A tremendous encounter now ensued, and the terrified Prévôt saw his dwelling a prey to the most unheard-of disorder, hardly knowing by whom he was injured most — his friends or his foes. The masked combatants began, however, to give way before the superior numbers of their assailants, by whom they were ill-treated and beaten in the most irreverent manner. It seemed as if the whole Chambre des Comptes had sent out every clerk in its jurisdiction, so much did they, who claimed the high-sounding titles proclaimed on all sides, swarm to the fray.

Long and serious was the conflict; but at length the cheers of the Emperor's party, and the shouts of the subjects of the Bazoche, proclaimed the victory over the more legitimate sovereigns, who were fain to make their retreat, covered by their few still faithful friends, who, disputing to the last, got away amidst the execrations of the mob, the shouts of triumph of the clerks, and the anathemas of the despoiled host, who cursed the hour when he beheld under his roof so many crowned heads, both legitimate and imaginary.

Thus ended the farce of the Hôtel d'Hercule, recorded by a contemporary historian, a fitting accompaniment to the tragedy of St. Bartholomew!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIELDS OF ST. GERMAIN DES PRÉS.

> "If they will fight with us, bid them come down
> Or void the field.
> If they do neither, we will come to them." — *King Henry V.*

EXTENDING far round the church and Abbey of St. Germain, called *des Prés*, were numerous fields the rightful possession of which from the earliest times had been a source of dispute between the students of the different Universities of Paris and the monks of the abbey. The former insisted on making use of this space for their amusement and recreation, and frequent disorders were the consequence of the permission, which had been wrested from, rather than granted by, the fathers. It required at one time no less than seventeen cardinals and a hundred and twenty-four bishops to discuss the matter of these disputed privileges, at a council held at Tours; on which occasion the *clerks* or students were condemned *to perpetual silence*,—an injunction which they were not at that, or any subsequent period, particularly prompt in attending to; and having, at a later time, again come forward to rescue their favourite fields from the clutches of the monks; the students were allowed the victory, and the right adjudged to them of *walking* in the precincts. Of this permission they certainly took advantage; but were very far from confining themselves to the sober pace laid down for them. Not only did they walk, but run, leap, dance, and play at all sorts of games; but this was not sufficient to satisfy their ideas of liberty enjoyed in their own domains, so that of combats, duels, political meetings, and all that could be transacted by the riotous and self-willed youth of Paris to create disturbance, the Prés aux Clercs was made the theatre. In the time of St. Louis this space provided a *champ clos* to the abbey, where disputes were decided by single combat; and here, in 1357, Charles le Mauvais, King of Navarre, harangued the Parisians.

One of the principal objects of contention had been the right of fishing in the canal called *La Petite Seine*, which abounded in excellent fish; and scarcely a year passed without some riots taking place to defend the privilege, which the students were resolved not to relinquish, and the monks were equally determined to maintain.

Early one fine morning a large party of young men had sallied forth with the intention of pursuing their sport, and had established themselves in a good situation to enjoy it. They were not without misgivings that their old enemies, the monks, would come to interrupt their amusement; and they, it must be confessed, rather desired than dreaded such an event.

They had been some time amusing themselves however without interruption, and were preparing to put an end to their fishing, and collecting their tackle, when they observed at a distance some of the monks approaching.

"Do you see yon black cloud?" said Belcastel: "methinks it portends a storm."

"Had we not better seek shelter?" suggested one of the most timid of the party.

"By no means," replied the first speaker; "we are on our own ground, and fishing in our own river, and we will give way to no interloper."

"Let us stand to it," repeated the students; "and if it comes to blows, try which will hit hardest."

By this time the monks had come near, and the foremost amongst them, who was a fat, short, ambling individual, called out in a threatening voice for the students to leave off their sport, and to resign what they had already caught to their rightful owners.

A shower of pebbles and a volley of abuse was all the answer returned, which made the monks turn upon their heels and run a considerable distance, till they had reached a wall, behind which they sheltered themselves; and their champion, who was the Petit Feuillant himself, volunteered to harangue the disorderly band, who so irreverently received them. Accordingly he mounted on a high stone for the purpose of exhorting them to more conformable conduct. But his advice was cut short by yells and hisses,

and cries of "A bas les barbes frisés!"—"A bas les Renards!"

At this moment, however, the monks emerged suddenly from behind their wall, where they had sticks and staves concealed, and commenced a furious assault upon the students, breaking their lines and destroying their nets, and dealing hard blows around them. They were received with much warmth, and kicks, cuffs, and blows were dealt with equal vigour on both sides; but the young men, being unarmed, were no match for their more numerous assailants, and were obliged to retreat, leaving the produce of their day's sport a prey to the exulting monks, who, seizing it eagerly, in spite of all the struggles of the opposite party to prevent them, made off with the prize, and were soon safely housed within their convent; the Petit Feuillant leading the way.

The discomfited *clercs*, in high indignation, thundered in vain at the gates, and discharged stones against the windows. Having vented their rage, they proceeded to visit the boundaries, and discovering that the report was but too true which announced the innovations made, they resolved that many hours should not elapse before all the sheds, ricks, outhouses, and stables erected on their ground, should be swept from the face of the land. They hastened, therefore, back to their colleges, where the news of the success of the monks, and the insult offered to their body, spread like wildfire, and a call for vengeance was replied to with enthusiasm by every member of the outraged community.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ABBEY.

"And strokes like that of a battering-ram
Did shake the strong church-door."
Old Woman of Berkeley.

When Alix, after being conveyed away from the theatre of Ganasso, recovered her consciousness, she found herself in a chamber where every object was entirely unknown to

her. It was furnished in a style of luxury which accorded somewhat strangely with the monastic character of the roof and high-pointed window. Rich tapestry with gold fringe depended from the walls, and mats of oriental fabric were spread on the marble floors; a high cabinet of inlaid ivory and mother-of-pearl stood in the recess of the window; and coffers, then commonly used for seats, richly ornamented with gold leather, stood near the walls. Incense of fragrant wood was burning in alabaster lamps, hanging by silver chains from crossed arrows with gilded heads, and other emblematical devices; while delicate figures of Cupids in white marble groups, chiseled with consummate skill, were half hid by flowers arranged in garlands. In one recess of the chamber was a gorgeously ornamented altar, on which stood a Cupid bending his bow, and before him, as offerings, were placed nests of filigree gold work, containing birds and eggs in enamel. A small Venetian mirror hung behind the statue, and reflected its symmetry. At one side of the room stood a *clavicorde*, beautifully carved, and open, as if the instrument had been recently touched; and there was an air of mysterious beauty which pervaded the whole which Alix could not comprehend.

She turned her gaze towards the window, but it was too high from the ground for her to attempt to see what was beyond. A rich sunlight streamed through the coloured glass, which was less intense in colour than that which usually filled up the elaborate leaden lattice-work of this sort of window, while that in the lower compartments was partly painted in the mode called *grisaille*, introduced not many years before by the celebrated artist Jean Cousin, whose delicate grey and white tracery permitted a livelier light to enter.

She walked round her splendid prison, and examined the tapestry; but she could discover no door nor outlet of any description, so artfully were the carved panels inserted; and she began to fancy she was in a dream of some enchanted palace, where a fairy could alone enter. Hour after hour elapsed, but her solitude was undisturbed, and she became more and more alarmed and uneasy at her extraordinary position, and the impossibility of explaining

it. She recalled to her mind the appearance of the ecclesiastic who had betrayed her with an appearance of friendliness. She pictured to herself her father's anxiety and fears for her safety, — the suspicions he might entertain of her having withdrawn from his roof to avoid Bianco, and his anger and vexation. She thought, too, of Claude with blushes and tears, and she reproached herself with having received his avowal so coldly, and replied so ungraciously, as she imagined, to his generous offers of service; then she recalled the half-acknowledgment she had allowed to escape of her feelings towards him, and she trembled lest she had said too much.

While she thus mused the tapestry was gently withdrawn, and by means of a sliding panel a figure was admitted, which Alix instantly recognised as that of the monk to whose perfidious offers of protection she owed her present captivity. He paused as he entered, and threw himself into an attitude of admiration.

"Cupido dio!" exclaimed he, affectedly, — "what a form! How fares my lovely prize? But I need not ask, when I behold such beauty."

"What," said Alix, rising, "am I to understand by these words? Am I an object of insult or contempt? Why am I here? and for what purpose did you think fit to deceive me thus? I insist upon being immediately conducted to my home and my father."

"Sweet incensed," said the Petit Feuillant, "it grieves me to deny any of your requests, or to refuse to answer any of your numerous questions; but circumstances render me inflexible; and since you must alike submit to them, I recommend you to follow the advice of the sage, who advises us to think of joy in order to drive away the thought of pain, and to conquer sorrow by diverting it."

"This jargon is unintelligible to me," said Alix. "Where am I? and by what right do you, whom I know not, detain me from my friends?"

"Where you are, fair enslaver," returned Montgaillard, "I am not at liberty to inform you. By the right of conquest you are here; and I detain you from your supposed friends, in order to secure to you real ones. I am aware, sweet Alix, of your position. René Bianco——"

"Oh, heavens!" interrupted Alix. "Surely I am not in the power of that detested wretch? I tell you nothing on earth shall induce me to listen to one word the murderer has to say."

"I rejoice to hear it," replied the monk, coolly opening his comfit-box, which he offered her with great politeness, regardless of her averted looks, "for it would be a great mortification were it otherwise; but so few women *do* care for their affianced husbands, that your distaste for the Florentine does not surprise me. But, my sweet friend, you have been in this retreat some time, and my duty as an ecclesiastic obliges me to name to you that during the whole period—for you have been watched by other eyes than Cupid's — I have observed in all your distress, and amidst all your tears, which but render your bright eyes brighter, you have never had recourse to the intercession of any of the saints to assist you. This is a strange omission, and in these heretical times might breed fearful suspicions."

As he spoke, there was a sarcastic expression in his eye, which convinced Alix that he was aware of, or at least suspected, the nature of her faith. She immediately conceived an idea that her extraordinary abduction had some reference to that fact, and she trembled as she thought of the fate which might be in store for her. Finding she did not reply, the Petit Feuillant continued,

"Our Court ladies," said he, "although they have, in fact, but little sanctity, yet preserve the appearance of it, and wear in their fair bosoms the emblems of our sacred faith; but you, fair negligent, bear no saving sign, and cannot therefore expect that the saints will interfere to help you."

"It ill becomes one of your sacred calling," said Alix, "to reproach an apparent neglect of duty, when he himself acts in a manner so opposed to all the precepts which he is accustomed to instil."

Montgaillard smiled,—"I shall answer you by a parable," said he. "A countryman, disgusted at the profligate character of the minister of his village, refused to attend mass. He seated himself during the time of divine service

by the side of a clear stream, when he was accosted by a friend, who, hearing his reason for declining to visit the church, led him to the source of the rivulet, where the water was thick and muddy, and apparently choked with weeds. 'You see,' said he, 'that the water, whose source is impure, is not in itself less clear and good.' Thus the word of God, preached by an unworthy minister, is not the less to be revered."

"Is it possible," said Alix, "that you dare thus to proclaim your own unworthiness by likening yourself to the wicked priest; yet, knowing your faults, continue in the commission of them?"

"Lady," replied Montgaillard with affected meekness, "I am too humble to claim virtues which are not my own, and am content with the reputation which I enjoy. Content, my sweet unbeliever, is one of the first duties; and as long as beauty does not frown on me, as I am grieved to see you do now, — as long as gold is in plenty, — and I hear no bad music, nor suffer from bad cooks, I venture to hope that I follow my duty faithfully, for there are few happier or more easy in conscience than he who now entreats you to smooth the brow where anger should never sit, and forget all your vexations by the help of a little philosophy, — for you are totally unable to leave this place, and reproach or entreaties only distress me, while they cannot aid you in the least."

"Leave me, frivolous and abandoned man!" said Alix indignantly; "let me not be disgusted with hearing the language of levity from lips which should only move in prayer."

"Fair Huguenot!" replied the Petit Feuillant, — "for so I doubt not I ought to call you, — you are cruelly severe."

"Monk!" said Alix, "I disdain concealment, and should blush to belong to a faith which harbours in its bosom such impure ministers as yourself. I am ready to pay the penalty of my belief. Whatever fate may be adjudged to me, it will at least release me from Bianco, and his associates in crime."

"I admire your candour," said Montgaillard, "but you

are singularly deceived. Bianco is ignorant of your present circumstances, and is at this moment, I doubt not, raging for his stolen mate, and moving the Court and the Saints for her recovery; your father is also entirely under the cloud of uncertainty. I alone am the happy depositary of the secret."

"Under whose guidance, then, do you act?" exclaimed Alix. "Why was I not publicly accused and brought to trial; or why not at once punished for my opinions? Methinks but little form attended most of the late executions of my unfortunate brethren! Why mock one victim with a pretence like this, when murder, to which you are accustomed, might do its work unquestioned?"

"Beautiful heretic!" answered the monk, "you are wandering in an inexplicable maze of error: murder or punishment has nothing whatever to do with your present detention,—love is the directing genius of all. Think not those charms could be destined to wither unadmired, except by paltry grooms and adventuring pages. No; you are sought and loved by one of high birth, of princely fortune, and of fascinating manners."

"And who is he," said Alix, in a tone of great contempt, "who takes such noble means to gain the object of his exalted passion?"

"He is at your feet!" exclaimed another voice, and La Mole suddenly appeared before her.

She started in extreme amazement, and regarded him with so much surprise, as well as terror, that he could not suppress a smile. His fine person was adorned with the nicest care, his countenance was bright with exultation, and his whole demeanour expressive of satisfaction.

In accents of the tenderest respect he uttered apologies and regrets, mingled with protestations of attachment, and vows of eternal truth. She listened in silent fear, and the bewilderment of her mind was now at its height, for the meaning of the strange position in which she was placed was more and more distant from her comprehension.

"Whoever you may be," she said at length, "and for whatever cause this drama has been got up, I desire to be

no more an actor in it, and entreat you to retire and leave me unmolested. You are an entire stranger to me, nor do I desire to become acquainted with persons who are either ridiculous or wicked."

La Mole was proceeding with infinite eloquence to persuade her of the delicacy of his feelings, the purity of his regard, and the despair which had urged him to the step he had taken, when Montgaillard, who had retired as he entered, returned suddenly in great confusion.

"My Lord," he cried, "a band of marauders have forced the gates of the convent. We oppose them in vain! Hark! hear you not those sounds? — they bode no good to us or ours!"

While he spoke, a tremendous crash was heard without, and a multitude of voices burst on the ears of the astonished group.

"They come!" shrieked Alix. "The murderers are again let loose!"

"Holy Mary!" cried Montgaillard, "what do they here? We are no Huguenots. My Lord, La Mole, you must instantly show yourself; they will respect so stanch a friend to the cause of Holy Church."

The cries without seemed to approach, loud and vociferous, and proceeding from many voices.

La Mole sprang upon a seat, and piling another on it he climbed to the cabinet, from the top of which he could look from the high window.

"Ha!" said he, "what means this? They seek no Huguenots — they are storming the abbey — they wear students' robes."

"Alas!" cried the Petit Feuillant, who stood shivering below with terror — "students, did you say? What will become of us!"

"Yes," repeated La Mole; "they are in an immense body. They have burst the outer gate, and are rushing in crowds towards the walls: the drawbridge is down, and access will be easy to them: they are destroying the trees, and plucking branches, which they bear in triumph. What means all this?" he exclaimed, leaping down.

"St. Francis protect us!" said the monk, in a faltering

accent. "We must forthwith conceal ourselves: this isolated wing is no safe place for us. The turbulent students accuse the father abbot of encroaching on the Pré aux Clercs; and no doubt they are come to revenge themselves, and endeavour to regain their ground. They seem to have come in earnest this time!"

"By the saints!" cried La Mole, "and their mode of attack is something unpleasant!"

At this moment a wreath of smoke began to curl among the trees, the shouts without were redoubled, and loud strokes were heard against the doors of the building.

Terrified at this proceeding, Montgaillard rushed to unclose the secret panel of entrance, and La Mole, eager to prevent or avert the danger, was following, when Alix, with tears, entreated them not to abandon her to destruction.

"You will be in no danger, lovely insensible," said La Mole. "I will close the panel, and no one will discover your retreat. I thank you for reminding me of this, or my fair prize might have been stolen from me."

So saying, they both departed, leaving Alix still a prisoner, and terrified to find herself abandoned to perish in the flames, which now rose so high, that they threw a bright glow on the stained windows above her. She shrieked loudly for help, and exhausted herself in vain efforts to discover some means of egress. The roar without now became terrific, and thundering strokes redoubled, till presently loud crashes were heard, accompanied by new cries. Exerting every effort, Alix climbed up towards the window by means of the pile raised by La Mole, and an extraordinary scene presented itself to her sight.

A confused crowd of artisans, labourers, shopmen, and persons of various descriptions, armed with weapons as singular as their appearance, were rushing along, headed by an almost countless number of young students in their caps and gowns, some of whom bearing torches darted from tree to tree (for the scene of her confinement was in the immense garden of the abbey), setting fire to every thing they encountered, and urging on their followers with cries of, "Down with the walls! Fire and faggot for the

thievish monks! Let us make martyrs of St. Nicholas' priests!"

A mass of ruins behind them showed how successful they had hitherto been in their advance; and the unequal contest they waged with a small band of armed men, — kept always in religious institutions in case of danger, — seemed to promise them victory. Suddenly a party of lay brethren, accompanied by a fresh body of guards, issued from the principal entrance, and the conflict then became serious. The furious mob had already gained the walls of that part of the building from whence Alix was a spectator of the fray, when a shock which made the massy fabric tremble, announced that another door had been burst open. Alix beheld immediately after, amidst shouts and laughter, the Petit Feuillant borne on the shoulders of a party of students. His streaming garments and disordered appearance accorded well with the terrified expression of his countenance, as, hurrying him along with exclamations of contempt and ridicule, they reached the borders of a small lake directly under the window where Alix was stationed. Here they paused a moment, deliberating whether they should throw him in, when one of them cried out, "Hold, friends! We want not the lives of these robbing knaves. It is sufficient to duck him in the lake, to teach him how to oppress his neighbours."

"Good gentlemen! — good students!" shrieked Montgaillard, "I am not of this order. I am a Feuillant — an innocent stranger, who never committed offence against you. I am Bernard de Montgaillard. Have pity, my gentle masters!"

"He speaks sooth," said one of the students. "It is the Petit Feuillant, who dances the gailliard in the midnight processions, — the favourite of all the fair dames of the Court. Dip him gently two or three times, and let him go; but beware how you injure his delicate form."

With renewed laughter, and in spite of the entreaties and struggles of the monk, he was immersed, without much regard to the concluding clause in the address of the last speaker, and then allowed to escape, amidst the taunts and jeers of the mob.

The flames were beginning to grow fainter, and part of the band of assailants seemed disposed to retire, having committed as much depredation on the Abbey property as they felt for the present inclined. Alix reflected that, should she lose this chance of escape, her situation would be most alarming, and she resolved to claim the protection of the students, in whose hands she conceived herself more likely to be safe than in those of the holy men under whose roof she was detained. She therefore redoubled her cries, by which means she at length attracted the attention of some of those nearest her, who having caught a glimpse of her figure as she bent eagerly forward, renewed their attack on that part of the building. After many efforts, the panelling of the apartment gave way, and discovered her in the deep recess of the high window. Some of the assailants drew back, and a cry of "A miracle! — the blessed Virgin herself!" was heard, and the pale cheeks of many showed their fear of having gone too far in attacking a sanctuary under divine protection. Alix lost no time in undeceiving them, by relating her unjust detention, and concluded by claiming their protection and assistance in restoring her to her father. She entreated that she might be without delay conducted home by some of the gentlemen present, to whom she would declare her name when the crowd was withdrawn. Two or three young students advanced, and having rescued her from her perilous situation, assured her she was safe in their care, and under their escort she was borne from the scene of her late imprisonment.

Leaving around them a heap of still smoking ruins, the students retired, highly satisfied with their adventure.

They continued their way unmolested through several streets, and already Alix began to hope that she should reach her father's abode in safety, when on a sudden the party was met by a band of the King's archers, conducted by a monk of the order of St. Germain des Prés, who instantly fell upon them with a violence which, however resolute the students might be, they were totally unable to withstand. A desperate struggle ensued, and, a crowd collecting rapidly, Alix found herself exposed to new

dangers. The young man who had been foremost in protecting her, and whom his companions called Belcastel, still, however, continued to maintain his stand near her, though all the others had abandoned their charge to meet the attack. At length the students gave way, and her conductor cried out in an agitated voice,

"There is no safety for you. Fly, madam, instantly. Yonder street will conduct you towards the river, from whence you may reach your home."

He had scarcely spoken when Alix found herself abandoned in the midst of the crowd. She summoned all her firmness, and rushing forward succeeded in reaching an open space, and with the speed of an arrow darted along the opposite streets, unknowing of her way, and fearing in every person she saw to recognise a pursuer or an enemy. Hurrying along in the utmost terror she was turning the corner of a street, when she beheld a troop of horsemen riding at full speed, escorting a carriage, the horses of which were impelled along without regard to any passengers who might be so imprudent or unlucky as to be in their vicinity. Such was the fashion among the great, and considered a requisite method to impress the importance of the person within the vehicle on the minds of the foot-passengers. Before she could withdraw from the tumult, a horseman, who had not perceived her, or was unmindful of the circumstance, passed her so close that she narrowly escaped being crushed against the projecting wall. She had just time to spring on a high stone by the roadside when the whole cavalcade passed; but the carriage was borne along so furiously that one of the wheels coming in contact with the stone on which she stood, received so violent a shock that the equipage was forced to stop in order to be extricated from its entanglement.

A person in the carriage looked out, with an angry exclamation at the delay, and Alix discovered the features of her late persecutor, La Mole. She could not repress a faint shriek, and the nobleman instantly perceiving her, ordered her to be secured by his people, and leaping from the vehicle, was in time to catch her in his arms, as, overcome with alarm and despair, she sank down senseless.

La Mole had received the royal order to join the army before La Rochelle, and had resolved to visit the Abbey in order to see the fair prisoner there concealed before he set out on his journey. On escaping from the besieged building at the time of Montgaillard's seizure, he with all speed regained his people, who were in readiness, and awaiting only his command to commence their route. His return, therefore, from his unfavourable adventure was the signal for departure; and springing into the carriage, in which, though contrary to the custom of officers engaged in military duties, he chose to travel, he hurried forward on his way, — not doubting but that Alix was safe in the monastery, however misused his deserted friend the monk had been. His surprise, then, at encountering her again so strangely was the greater, and with extraordinary satisfaction he assisted his attendants to place her apparently lifeless form in the carriage, and gave her in charge to his physician, while, mounting the horse of one of his train, he rode by the side of the vehicle, which resumed its course, though in a less impetuous manner.

CHAPTER X.

THE PROPOSAL.

"My life thou shalt command, but not my shame." — SHAKSPEARE.

WHEN the President reached the place where he had been told he should find his daughter, he was alarmed to discover no signs of her, and the man who directed him was no longer near. He hurried back without losing a moment, and met René and Ruggieri hastening towards him.

"Where is Alix? — where is my daughter?" he exclaimed; "an accident has separated us, and she must be, at this moment, struggling in the crowd."

"Blessed Saints!" cried René; "what an untoward event! The people are dispersing; there is scarcely one

left in the theatre; she must have remained, expecting your return."

"No," suggested Ruggieri, "she has probably endeavoured to reach home under the protection of some friend. Let us fly to ascertain her safety."

Accordingly, after taking a brief survey of the house, they returned to the President's abode, where the consternation of Bailly and his intended son-in-law was extreme on finding no trace of her.

A thought flashed on the President's mind that she had purposely withdrawn herself, to escape the hateful marriage to which she was doomed, but he did not venture to hint his suspicions of such a probability.

Bianco, furious with disappointment, gave way to the utmost violence, accusing himself and her father, and uttering vows of vengeance against those who had carried her off. Ruggieri acted his part with great dexterity, appearing to feel deeply for his friend, and to be indignant at the abduction, offering his assistance, and urging René to every exertion.

"I will go instantly to the Queen-mother," exclaimed René; "she shall be recovered, if power or cunning can effect it. But have you any suspicion, Bailly; had she lovers, enemies, or friends, who would do this?"

"I am distracted with fear and doubt," said her father, "and can point to no person. My poor Alix! where can she be? Oh, God! if the Huguenots have seized her as a victim; if they should make reprisals, — and yet," — he checked himself, for he thought of her late confession, and calmed his momentary terror; but his mind was a chaos of confused ideas, and he scarcely knew whom to trust, or on whom his doubts ought to fall.

Bianco returned to the Queen-mother in a state of great agitation, and recounted to her sympathizing ear his tale of distress.

"This is some enemy," said Catherine.

"This secretary, this protégé of the Vache de Bearne, it may be who robs me of my bride, as he has hitherto frustrated my vengeance," exclaimed René.

"If so," replied Catherine, "despond not; you shall

have both, if my influence can serve you. The King protects him, it is true; but when," said she, smiling bitterly, "did he find that he could outwit me? René, I am much disturbed; this Huguenoterie triumphs in spite of all;—there are risings in every part of the kingdom. In every Court our measures are condemned; that wily and squeamish heretic, Elizabeth of England, is against us. Our ambassador sends me word that, when he waited on her, to explain the late proceeding, he found the Court in mourning, and every eye turned on him with hostility. The cunning pedant, herself, was full of vituperation. Fénélon is not warm in the cause; I will have De Retz go to her peevish island, and win her by his flatteries; what say you, René, would it not be well?"

"Yes, Madonna," answered René; "and why not send some trusty messenger, with a token of your Grace's regard to the vain Queen? I could prepare the present, and you would not long be troubled with her remonstrances. The Catholics are ripe in England for revolt. Why should not the Lady Marie Stuart reign, and this Tudor race be swept away at one blow?"

"How?" said the Queen; "and give up the alliance for Anjou?—that were scarcely politic."

"The Queen of England has many lovers," answered the Italian; "these will content her, she will never choose a husband to control her—believe it not, Madonna, and be not deceived by her feigned acquiescence in the proposals of the Duke."

"You are right," returned Catherine; "I never, to speak truth, trusted her a moment, but we cannot show how little we rely on her. I shall consider your proposal, and if I decide on this advice, which I think good, you shall yourself accompany De Retz to England, and be the means of ridding me of more foes. In the meantime, I will straight to the King, and be active in your cause. The girl cannot be conveyed far away; and depend upon it, we shall soon hear of her. But leave me, René, now, for the King seeks me at this hour; and I see they are coming to announce him."

Bianco departed, full of vexation, and breathing ven-

geance against his supposed enemy, while King Charles, with little better spirit, took his place with the Queen-mother. He was irritable, and in one of his worst moods, for he had not lost the recollection of either the blows or vituperation he had lately received at the Prévôt Nantouillet's, and the evident detestation in which he was held by his subjects opened his eyes, too late, to the impolicy of the late barbarous act.

He entered the chamber hastily, and, throwing himself into a seat, exclaimed, as if scarcely regarding his mother,—

"I will have that rascal hanged, — a brute and idiot! That I should have to ask twice for my hawk, and then find the wretch had forgotten my orders altogether! I could tear him to pieces! I will be revenged on the dolt."

He continued to exclaim in this manner for some time, when Catherine, addressing him, said in a contemptuous accent, —

"You would do better methinks to vent your anger on those more deserving of it. You rave at a paltry groom for disobedience, while you suffer yourself to be dictated to by insolent subjects, who brave you to your face."

"Madam," cried he, starting up with fury, "you are the cause of all: you foment and encourage rebellion, and then throw the blame and punishment on me. I am hated, abhorred, treated with scorn by my people and my allies; and you urge me still. Yes, — your hero-son, your beloved knight, shall have the means of distinguishing himself again. I will not have him always near you, and always scheming to win the world's affections from me. He shall command the army, which I will send against the obstinate Rochellois; and that without delay. I shall thus get rid of many plagues at once; and I care not if the stubborn fools hold out till the Polish subjects of my beloved brother send to claim him."

Catherine bit her lip, but did not condescend to notice the last allusion, when she replied,—

"You are right, Charles. An army must instantly be despatched to La Rochelle; and I approve greatly of your intention. La Nouë is the best man to negotiate with them; for Birón they will no longer listen to. La Nouë is their

ancient governor, and they rely firmly on him. Let him, therefore, offer them terms; and meantime it will be well that every preparation be made for besieging them. We will use art as long as it seems likely to avail us; and either by stratagem or force the town must soon be ours."

"But think you we can trust La Nouë?" said Charles.

"We may," replied Catherine; "he is one of those visionaries who imagine every one in high station directed by honour, which he considers the best policy; and with a few fine sounding speeches, he will easily be persuaded to lead these people into the net. Biròn will be ready to take advantage of every circumstance; and if he has a powerful army to back him, success is certain."

"The King of Poland shall head the troops," said Charles. "Navarre, Condé, and Anjou shall be there too. I will send all these active spirits out of Paris at once, and while we have peace here, war shall flourish at a distance. We must reduce these towns without delay; Sancerre, Montauban, Nismes, and fifty others, dare to withstand my commands. But," he continued, rubbing his hands with delight, "they butchered the Huguenotaille to my heart's content elsewhere. Thousands and thousands have fallen, — like a swarm of locusts destroyed. Oh! that my eyes could have feasted on the carnage everywhere — that my arm could have dealt them death in every quarter!"

He walked rapidly about the chamber as he muttered the last words, while Catherine watched him with an expression of countenance difficult to define. There was no affection, no sympathy in the glance: it told of mistrust and discontent, — but at the last, a gleam of satisfaction shone on her face as a sudden truth became evident to her; and she felt convinced that the mind of her elder son was giving way, his health declining, and his place likely to be left vacant for her beloved Henry to fill.

She was pleased to find that he constantly recurred to the delight he felt in the late massacres, and she despaired not of obtaining the life of the person against whom René had a feud.

"How is your nurse, Charles?" she began; "the poor good woman deserves my thanks for her care of your

health. You should consider her, my son; she grows old, and must be greatly fatigued. Has she sufficient attendants, and is she well cared for? I have been negligent of poor Mabille of late."

Charles, pleased at the interest shown in his favourite, answered gently that she was well.

"I trembled for her in the general confusion," said his mother; "but doubtless you took charge of her safety."

"Yes," replied Charles, "I saved her by locking her into her chamber: what a night she must have passed!"

"Was she alone, dear Charles?" asked Catherine, carelessly: "it was, indeed, a fearful time for an old woman — and alone."

Charles stopped suddenly in his walk, and, with the cunning which usually attends on madness, — for he was in a state bordering on that malady, — he saw at once that his mother concealed some design in her question, and he resolved to foil her.

"She had a companion," said he, "whom I was fool enough to save too."

"Indeed!" returned Catherine; "who is he?"

"Oh, you know of *him*, then?" replied Charles laughing. "Why do you ask about him? Is he aught to you or those near you? Has Messire Bianco any business with him?"

"Charles," said the Queen, "I will tell you the truth. You must accord me one favour; I seldom ask one, and this is of importance. That young man is a bitter Huguenot, and has deeply injured a friend of mine. Give him up to my justice, and rid yourself of a dangerous person, whom it is not prudent to keep about the palace. He is a spy of Navarre; I know all concerning him, and how he will be best disposed of."

"I care not," said the King. "Do with him as you will: only never let your Florentine empiric dare to approach my nurse. I swear to you, madam," he cried, his eyes flashing fire, "if harm ever comes to her I will destroy that accursed wizard, if my own death followed his instantly. I abhor his sight, he conjures up visions which I can never banish. Mother! at night, every night, I see

Jeanne of Navarre hovering round my bed, livid and spotted, as she died, — and you know how she died! oh God! — that man!"

He covered his eyes with his hands, and sank down. Catherine, alarmed, called for assistance; and at that moment the young Queen Elizabeth being announced she left him to her gentle care and quitted him, well pleased to have obtained both the information and permission she desired.

Soothed and comforted by his amiable wife, the unhappy Prince shortly recovered, and as his mind became calmer the cruel and gloomy thoughts he entertained by degrees disappeared, and he reflected, with uneasiness, on the tacit permission he had given to deliver up the friend of his nurse.

After a time his ideas took another turn, and he despatched a page to summon Mabille and Claude to his presence.

Claude during these events remained still an inmate of the Palace, nor could he summon resolution to attempt an escape, since, by doing so, he should absent himself from Alix, and lose the chance of affording her assistance, in case of need. Mabille, nevertheless, advised his delaying his departure, under some disguise, as little as possible; but as rigorous measures were still in force against the Protestants, and great caution was requisite, she was the more readily induced to listen to his arguments on the advantage of his remaining concealed in Paris. She persuaded him not to attempt to visit Alix, as his presence might involve her in extreme danger, but volunteered to go herself and bring him tidings of her welfare. He did not attempt to conceal from her the secret of his heart; and, although she saw the improbability of any happy result, she could not but listen with affectionate interest to his hopes and fears, and afford him all the consolation in her power.

Deeply was she distressed on finding, when she sought the house of the President, what had occurred; she feared to attempt to see Bailly, and could only vaguely learn the particulars of the disappearance of Alix. Vainly did she

and Claude endeavour to account for her flight, without their being apprised of her intention, but they scarcely doubted that she had, by some sudden combination of untoward circumstances, been forced into this measure.

"This very night," exclaimed Claude, "I am resolved to attempt an escape from Paris. I feel certain that she has directed her steps to La Rochelle, where, Heaven grant, she may be able to arrive in safety. Oh! why did she reject my offer of protection! I could, at least, have defended her with my arm, and now how is she attended? Can she be alone, unguarded? To what peril, what fearful peril has she exposed herself by this fatal delicacy! and I supine here, lingered in the vain hope that she would trust me."

While he yet spoke the summons that Charles had sent reached them, and, full of anxious hope, Claude followed Mabille to his chamber.

Arrived there, Charles received them with some appearance of kindness, and, after a few words to the nurse, he addressed Claude.

"Young man," he said, "your life has been saved by little less than a miracle; to me you owe its preservation; but, as your fate is still in my hands, it depends on yourself whether I shall be your friend or enemy. Your safety requires that you quit Paris; you may be weak enough to suppose that not difficult, but, I tell you, spies and guards are in every avenue, and, were it not so, I do not intend that you should be so fortunate in eluding my designs always. Mabille, I know, would willingly deceive me, for your sake, — even she would betray me, but I will not have it so. You shall act as I dictate. Do not attempt to oppose my will; — it will be of no avail, and I require your aid in a point which concerns me. Will you do any thing to show your gratitude?"

"Any thing, your Grace, that my conscience will permit," said Claude, boldly.

The King sneered. "You Huguenots," he answered, "always prate of conscience, as if it was not the last thing that ever opposed a man's interest. After his desires are satisfied, indeed," he added, musing, "sometimes the

slumberer wakes, — too late. But to the purpose. You shall enlist as a volunteer in the army which I am sending against La Rochelle."

Claude started involuntarily, as he heard the place named where all his wishes tended.

"Your conduct will be well observed, and I expect good service from you," continued the King. "This squeamish conscience of yours may be at ease, methinks, when you find so many of your Huguenot friends have quieted theirs for the occasion. The King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé will, perhaps, be associates to whom you need not object."

"Where they are," replied Claude, "all the servants of your Grace should be proud to be; and, guided by them, I will act as a faithful and grateful subject should do."

"These are fine speeches," returned Charles, contemptuously, "and I dare say, you are all faithful, and attached, and obedient subjects, — so are my good people of La Rochelle; but their way of showing these virtues does not please me. I can teach you a much better, and require but one proof of your sincerity. Now listen to me. There are some good Catholics, as well as Huguenots, who are distasteful to me, and amongst them is the Count La Mole; he will be in command of some of my troops; I will give you opportunities of being near him, and I select you as an instrument to execute my purpose respecting him. He has insulted — but what matters it why?" as he spoke, he clenched his hands, and shut his teeth so closely that his words were scarcely audible. "I am injured, and will be revenged!"

"Your Grace," said Claude, shuddering, "cannot mean ——"

"I mean," cried Charles, fiercely, "that you should take away his life. I might have had it done here, in Paris, at the Court; — am I not master? — am I not to command — to punish? — but it will better content his favourers that he should be supposed to die in fight, and I would not deprive my good brother of such a pleasure, for he loves him well."

"Sire," said Claude, firmly, "my life is in your hands;

I am defenceless, and have no power to contend against your decree; but I am unfit to act as an assassin, and I cannot accept the office."

He spoke proudly, and with dignity, and Charles for a moment quailed beneath the flash of his sparkling eye; but recovering himself in an instant, he added:

"You are a fool, and a vain boy! — Hear the alternative. The Queen-mother has a favourite called René Bianco; do you know him? I see, by your start, that you do; he is one at whose name all honest men start, and I honour you for your appreciation of his merits: he has discovered your retreat, and I have granted him your life. This is the position in which you stand. I send for this good friend of yours, and when you quit this chamber the daggers of his trusty agents are in your heart. I shall not attempt to protect you, and nurse Mabille may wring her hands in vain. On the other hand, I offer you escape by this private door; horses are in readiness below, and attendants whom I have chosen; in a few hours you are far away from Paris and in safety. Think not your tender consciousness will serve the destined victim of my just anger: there are many ready to execute my will for a less reward than I propose to make you. He dies — if my own hand must deal the blow; by all the Saints I swear it!"

Claude, shrinking with horror, revolved rapidly in his own mind the fearful alternative presented to his choice. To reach La Rochelle was his most desired aim: deceit in this case might be excusable; he saw that he had to deal with a man little less than a maniac, that argument, entreaty, or opposition were alike vain; and to employ stratagem to escape from him was but as a hunter, pressed and in danger, would use every art to foil the savage animal who threatened to destroy him. Mabille stood motionless; but by her anxious signs and looks Claude understood that she advised his apparent compliance; he trusted to her to dispose the mind of the King to better thoughts, and he also saw the possibility of preserving him whom he was directed to murder; all these considerations, and the certainty that his own fate was inevitable,

should he reject this means, and that Alix would be left without a hope of protection and assistance, determined him to assume a character at which his mind revolted, and he replied in a voice trembling with emotion:

"My situation is hard, your Grace, I am persecuted and powerless; and if I might rely on your protection ——"

"You may depend on it," interrupted Charles; "your reward shall be ample, and you will have relieved the country of a plotting, designing traitor."

"You are obeyed," said Claude, struggling with his feelings. "I am the instrument of your will."

"There is little time to lose," exclaimed the King, apparently with satisfaction; "La Mole has already received orders to join the camp. I will have you introduced to be about his person, recommended not only by me, but by one whom he thinks, vain fool! is his friend; remember, Mademoiselle Marie Touchet will write to him of you, therefore be prepared in your lesson. Insinuate yourself into his confidence; he is a coxcomb, whose boastings you are not obliged to believe; that were too hard a task to impose on you. You shall have further instructions — be sure and secret; and, remember, I am not without my spies. Now, follow me, — never stop for farewells! — instantly!"

He stamped his foot impatiently, as Claude embraced the weeping nurse, who clung to him in extreme distress. Claude followed the King to another chamber, and obeyed his command to throw a cloak over his dress; then giving him a purse, and a sealed paper, he addressed him:

"This paper," said he, "will be your security; it is signed by my hand, you will pass free and unmolested: take this gold for your necessities; and when you return yourself to the spot which I shall indicate, to tell me the deed is done, you may claim this sum many times repeated."

He then touched a spring in the wainscot, and a door opening, discovered a small private stair.

"Descend," said he, "and cross the court below; you will find horses and two guides, who know my will, as far as regards your journey. You need make no remarks, nor ask any questions: they know their duty — do you yours."

So saying, the King closed the door behind him, and Claude descended the steps. He found all as had been described to him, and followed the directions of his employer implicitly, for mounting one of the horses, without a word, he started off at speed, accompanied by the companions which his singular position had introduced to him.

"And now," said Charles to himself, as he returned, "I have outwitted my lady-mother, and the insolent baladin, La Mole, will find that he has attempted to supplant me once too often!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE MEETING.

"If there be truth in sight, you are my Rosalind!" — SHAKSPEARE.

THE maritime town of La Rochelle, once forming part of the enormous possessions of the beautiful and frail heiress Eléonore of Aquitaine, was, by her marriage with the Duke of Normandy, transferred to England with the largest portion of France, which the imprudence of Louis VII. had thus given into an enemy's hand. This fine and important stronghold remained under the English dominion for some time: it was afterwards lost, and again won, being restored to England in exchange for Jean of France, the prisoner of Poitiers, together with three millions of gold crowns.

While it remained English, numerous privileges were granted which increased its industry, augmented its population, and sowed in the breasts of its inhabitants those seeds of liberty which they never allowed to decay when, in after years, La Rochelle was once again restored to France, in consequence of the redoubted knight, governor of the town, being more brave than learned, and outwitted by a cunning clerk, who could read the letter of instructions which the warrior trusted him to interpret, and misdirecting his movements, gave the advantage to Du

Guesclin. Bold, frank, and generous, the Rochellois were always jealous of the safety of their beloved town, and prudent in defending it. The reformed religion had there fixed its chief hold, and the care of the Prince de Condé had rendered it almost impregnable; add to which, the season of the year 1572, had been particularly productive: the harvest and the vintage had been abundant beyond all expectation, and not less than twenty-five thousand tons of wine were placed in the cellars of the town. From early morning till late at night, waggons and horses, laden with immense stores of provisions of every description, were constantly crowding the streets, and thus La Rochelle, which by sea could receive but few conveniences, was victualled by land in a manner hitherto undreamed of in their hopes of plenty. The remarkable beauty and serenity of the weather permitted all sorts of necessary works to go on, and reparations had been made in the walls and fortifications to a great extent, the inhabitants volunteering to assist with all their powers in so important a service, and all the strangers residing amongst them being actuated by the same desire to preserve the town in its strength and security, and to render it capable of resisting the attacks with which it was likely to be threatened.

La Rochelle is situated in the most advantageous manner for commercial purposes, and its isles of Ré and Oleron, opposite its port, form an immense roadstead, where vessels of great burthen can ride in safety in one of the finest harbours in Europe.

The Duke de Biròn had sought by every wile which could be devised, to induce the Rochellois to listen to the deceitful professions of the King, whose treachery had been felt by all those towns which had imprudently put their trust in him. Not only had they indignantly refused to obey the commands sent to them to admit the officers, called *of justice*, whose business it was to punish the supposed revolt of the Huguenots, but the bold Rochellois resolved to hold out to the last extremity, rather than expose themselves to the dangers which they felt were

inevitable, should the hypocritical Charles once get footing within their walls.

They had sent deputies to England to ask for assistance, and, as they heard that the Count de Montgomery had escaped the massacre of Paris, and had, after great difficulties, reached Elizabeth's capital, they trusted that succour would promptly arrive by sea which would enable them to sustain a prolonged siege such as their experience foresaw.

When the brave La Nouë, in obedience to the commands he had received in Paris, presented himself before the deputies who were appointed to hear his proposals, he was listened to with sorrow and regret. Speaking in the conviction that he recommended only an advantageous mode of proceeding, he entreated them to obey the King, to admit the governor sent them, and to lay down their arms, promising that nothing should be required of them contrary to their honour. When this harangue was finished, one of the deputies stepped forward, and answered in these words:

"We consented to hold a parley on this occasion, because we expected to have met the brave soldier La Nouë, from whom we felt certain of hearing nothing derogatory or unworthy of him or us: but we see him not. It is to little purpose that the person who now addresses us resembles him in features; La Nouë's soul is not there, and we are confident that we listen but to an impostor."

"Look on me again," replied La Nouë: "do I deserve to be forgotten? Behold! I have lost an arm in your service. Am I not your ancient governor, attached to you by every tie of feeling, and do you not owe me both gratitude and affection?"

"We owe them to the dear and excellent friend whom you have named," said the deputy; "for he by his courage, experience, and prudence defended our lives, and crowned himself with honour. But would he side with our foes? would he for any consideration lend himself to deceit? endeavour to inveigle us with fair promises? induce us to cast ourselves into the snares of those who have massacred our best and dearest friends? No, we cannot believe it;

and we entreat you to withdraw, nor insult the name of that Bras de Fer, whom we love, honour, and revere — for though you speak with his tongue, you counsel not with his heart."

This was more than the philosophy of the brave old soldier could endure.

"Enough!" cried he, reproach me no more. I have undertaken this embassy in the hope of accommodating all differences. If I did not believe the professions made through me, I swear to you that I had never uttered them; but your welfare is my sole aim, and since you will not attend to the words of friendship, believing them deceitful, what can I do but submit? Will you receive *me* as a friend — may I once more enter your town, dedicate myself to your service as before, and consult with those in whom you trust what will be the best method of assisting you?"

A shout of joyful consent interrupted his words; and, greatly to the annoyance of the Catholic party, who had not reckoned on his uncompromising honesty and real love for his old government, Bras de Fer, as he was familiarly called, entered La Rochelle amidst the acclamations of the delighted inhabitants who now looked confidently forward to success and triumph.

Such was the situation of La Rochelle when the army of Birón and Strozzi was augmented by the arrival of an immense force, and all the royal princes of France joined the standard which threatened the devoted town. But, notwithstanding the strength brought against it, its natural capabilities of resistance, and the resolute determination to hold out to the last, of all its inhabitants, made the intended siege a work of no little anxiety.

An immense number of Huguenot gentlemen had flocked to its walls of refuge: despair, regret, revenge, indignation, and valour, acted variously on the citizens, and made every man equal to an experienced soldier: the garrison was numerous, the commanders excellent, and the continued exhortations and encouraging addresses of no less that fifty-five Protestant ministers, who had there sheltered themselves from persecution, rendered them altogether,

almost invincible. Day after day fresh arrivals of fugitives, escaped from the universal massacre, swelled their ranks, and as they were well provided with provisions they had little to fear and all to hope.

The King of Poland, eager to distinguish himself again, as he had done at Jarnac and Moncontour, was resolved to conquer the obstinacy of the rebellious town, and looked proudly round on his gallant troops confident of victory. Francis of Anjou his brother, though attached to the chiefs of the Protestant party more than pleased his own, accompanied him. Henry of Navarre, his heart almost bursting with sorrow, shame, and indignation, which feelings were shared by the Prince de Condé, was forced to obey the peremptory orders sent him to join the army, and was led rather as a spectacle than expected to be of service on the occasion, except, inasmuch as his presence against his own people might injure him in their eyes.

Very different were the feelings of the Duke de Guise, and the Marquis de Mayenne his brother, who, chiefs in the late barbarous proceedings, saw only the gratification of their ambitious views, and a new field of glory open before them.

The frivolous and inert man of fashion, La Mole, had for a time cast off that character, and but for the foppishness of his appointments could scarcely have been recognised as the mere leader of the mode in Paris. When he arrived at the camp, he found to his infinite mortification, that the agitation and terror into which Alix had been thrown had caused her to be attacked with serious indisposition, and the physician who attended her declared that her life was in great danger. She received every care, and the strictest secrecy was necessarily observed, as the presence of a female under the peculiar circumstances in which she was placed would have caused the utmost scandal in the camp; and La Mole was aware that if this instance of his folly and contempt of orders were discovered, he should be visited with severe reprimands, and the object of his admiration would be at once taken from him.

While he was in this perplexity, and Alix was slowly

recovering from her alarming state of illness, Claude arrived with his letters from the King, appointing him to a post near the person of La Mole. It had been arranged by Charles, that the better to deceive his intended victim, Marie Touchet should write also to him, as if unknown to her royal lover, recommending the young volunteer, by this means assuring him of a good reception, and creating a familiarity which would be likely to further the King's design; for Marie, terrified at the jealousy which Charles had evinced, consented to save herself by sacrificing the lover, whom her encouragement and his own imprudence had betrayed: she had no other means of satisfying the vindictive rival of La Mole, who, in his secret soul still suspected her, and as her own interest was her paramount consideration, she had little remorse in permitting the removal of one who had it in his power to confirm the King's suspicions, and whose vanity and want of principle made him a dangerous confidant.

The new passion which La Mole had conceived for his fair prisoner having nearly effaced that of La Belle Marie, he paid little attention to her letter beyond the mere appointment of Claude, according to the orders of the King, consequently his questions did not embarrass his attendant as much as might have naturally been expected; and in a short time, finding Claude a useful auxiliary, in a military point of view, he became sensible that he had gained a great acquisition, in the addition to his establishment.

The refined manners of La Mole soon won the admiration of Claude, and though he observed little to excite his esteem, yet the native viciousness of the artful courtier being less called into action in the camp than at Court, much escaped his inexperienced mind which would otherwise have disgusted him. Little was Claude aware what an enemy to his happiness he was regarding with an indulgent eye.

On the other hand, La Mole had become attached to Claude. The simplicity of his manners, joined to a fearlessness and independence peculiar to his character, his ignorance of the world, or the Court, rendered him an object of interest, inasmuch as it furnished La Mole with

novelty, that charm which has such power over those who, wearied with enjoyment, seek constantly for change to recruit their exhausted senses.

On one occasion when Claude was in attendance on him, he bade him draw near, and listen to a communication which he had resolved to make, trusting that his zeal and prudence would prove him worthy of the confidence reposed in him.

"There is," said he, smiling, "a prisoner in my power whom sickness has reduced to great extremity. The patient is now, I am informed, in a state of convalescence, and I am desirous of paying a visit of congratulation on the occasion; but as I would signify my intention I depute you to be my messenger."

"Your Lordship honours me," said Claude; "may I inquire if the prisoner is of rank and lately taken?"

"The prisoner has been under my care for some time," answered La Mole. "I inquire little about rank, but of beauty I am well convinced there is sufficient store."

"How, my Lord! beauty?" said Claude, surprised.

"Yes," replied the courtier, "my prisoner is a female."

Claude started. "Some unfortunate lady, perhaps, of La Rochelle," cried he; "oh, my Lord, if so, let me be her advocate: let her meet with treatment from you not unbecoming a knight and a noble."

"I am too well acquainted with the rules of chivalry," answered La Mole, laughing, "to forget what is due to distressed damsels, but, as she has hitherto caused me little but alarm and vexation, I am anxious to change the scene: —go, therefore, and bear to her my devoirs, with a request to be permitted the honour of kissing her fair hand."

He then proceeded to inform Claude that he would be admitted to the prisoner, on presenting to the guard the ring which he delivered to him, and directed him to return as quickly as possible with the answer of the lady.

Claude departed on his errand, and having reached the tent indicated by La Mole, was conducted to that in which he was to behold the invalid. He felt a depression of spirits, as he pictured to himself some young wife or widow

torn from her dearest connexions and placed in a situation so distressing, and he inwardly resolved to be her protector. The guard who had led him thus far pointed to a seat and retired. In a few moments the canvass was drawn aside and a lady entered, her form entirely covered with a thick white veil. She stopped suddenly at the entrance, and remained motionless without uttering a word. Claude approached, and, in a low voice, delivered to her the message of La Mole, adding a hope that her indisposition was removed. The lady appeared to tremble violently, and Claude had only time to spring forward to prevent her falling, when, seating her on a low couch, he entreated her to be less agitated. The lady inclined her head towards him as he bent to support her, and a sigh burst from her bosom; one pale hand she suffered him to hold in his, while with the other she drew aside her veil, and he beheld what his bewildered imagination conceived to be the shade of Alix. Amazement deprived him of utterance, and a hasty sign from her, as she carefully replaced her veil, convinced him of the necessity of repressing the transports of his joy. He had scarcely recovered any degree of self-possession when a female entered, and, advancing towards Alix, began to reprove her for having quitted her protection.

While she was speaking, Claude had remained almost in a state of stupor, unable to comprehend the circumstances under which he found Alix: at length he ventured to inquire if the lady had been long indisposed.

"Since the fever left her," answered the attendant, "her reason has been obscured."

Without venturing another word Claude took his leave, and, with a slow step and heavy heart, returned to the tent of La Mole, whom he found in some perturbation in consequence of the result of a visit to the King of Poland, who, having obtained information relative to his prisoner, had angrily insisted on her being instantly sent from the camp. When informed of the state in which his fair captive still remained, La Mole bit his lip and exclaimed, "Why did I expose myself to this dilemma for the sake of a foolish girl, who gives me nothing but uneasiness?

What can be done?" continued he, pacing the chamber; "there is no way but to conceal her more closely, and give out that she is sent back to Paris."

"Would it not be better, my Lord," said Claude, endeavouring to speak without agitation, "really to let her return; her present situation admits but of little hope, and the occasional violence of her paroxysms must render her concealment difficult."

"Hold!" exclaimed the courtier; "I have for some time suspected trickery in this business, and am resolved myself to judge before I consent to part with my prize. To-morrow is fixed for an assault on the town: I have promised that to-night shall no longer find her in the camp; come, therefore, with me immediately, that my own eyes may witness if the beautiful maniac is so dreadful as she is represented."

Claude attempted, in vain, to dissuade him, but he received only an order to be prepared to attend his will. Accordingly they left the tent, and with hasty steps advanced towards that part of the outskirts of the camp where Alix was concealed. Claude followed La Mole in a state of mind scarcely to be conceived. Already had they paused before the entrance of the tent, he could bear his feelings no longer, and had placed his hand on the mantle of La Mole to detain him, when the latter, turning hastily round to inquire his meaning, perceived a troop of horse riding at full speed towards them.

"We are attacked!" exclaimed he, drawing his sword; "there is not a moment to be lost—a sortie of the enemy!—to arms!"

As he spoke, he rushed back, and the words were soon echoed among the sentinels. In an instant the clash of arms was heard, and La Mole, forgetful of his purpose in his eagerness to prevent a surprise, was soon lost to the sight of Claude. An idea flashed on his mind,—"What if, in the confusion, I could rescue Alix? it is worth the risk of attempting, and even should we be seized by this party, we shall but be taken as prisoners into the besieged town." These thoughts followed each other rapidly, as he darted forwards and threw open the tent, exclaiming,

"The enemy — be on your guard!" and passing the sentinels, with the quickness of light, reached the inner chamber. Alix was leaning, apparently asleep, on a low seat with her attendant at her side. On his abrupt entrance, the latter started up.

"Silence! — she sleeps," said she in a low tone.

"The enemy," cried he, "are close upon us, — fly, while yet you may."

The female uttered a loud cry, and her exclamations roused the invalid, who found herself already clasped in the arms of Claude, who had thrown his mantle over her, and was bearing her from the apartment.

Without comprehending what was passing, but satisfied of his zeal in her service, Alix was borne along by her lover, who passed the sentinel without question, as he supposed him to act by order of La Mole, and pressing forward, unconscious of his destined route, he continued to advance beyond the limits of the camp. The horsemen who had caused the late alarm, had slackened their pace, and were now within a few yards of the fugitives, when Claude exclaimed in a loud voice, —

"We resign ourselves your prisoners!"

To his astonishment, however, none of the party halted, but continuing their way at a brisk pace passed without bestowing any attention on his words. This was the more extraordinary, as Claude saw that they certainly wore the dress and colours of the Huguenot party. The troop did not exceed a dozen men, and their visit to the camp in so small a body appeared inexplicable. All proposals of treaty had been received but the day preceding with so much contempt by the Rochellois, and the reported arrival of the Count de Montgomery with sixty vessels, made it appear impossible that they should have consented to surrender. Unable to solve the enigma, he continued his uncertain course, still supporting Alix, whom amazement and fear deprived of speech. At length they reached a small copse, and here Claude ventured to pause, when, placing his fair burthen beneath a tree, he addressed to her a few words of explanation. As he spoke her pale countenance lighted up, and clasping her hands she fervently thanked him for

her delivery; he interrupted her acknowledgments with vows of service, and anxious hopes for her future safety.

"I have been deceived in yonder troop," said he, "who I hoped might be the means of conveying us to La Rochelle. I tremble for you; how can you support the fatigue and dangers which await you?"

"Fear not for me," exclaimed Alix, with animation; "I did but feign weakness, and am strong and able to endure all since I am at liberty once more. I can bear any thing but being in the power of that man."

Taking the hand which she extended to him, eagerly entreating that they should pursue their journey, Claude led her through the little wood. Following a rugged path they soon arrived near what through the trees they hoped was a hut, but discovered it to be a high cross, at the foot of which was a carved image of St. Nicholas.

"There must be some cottage near," said Claude, though much disconcerted at not finding an abode; "for this symbol is usually placed near some village on the sea-coast."

They continued to advance, and at length, at a short distance before them, they perceived the roof of a cottage, half concealed in the thick wood, by which it was surrounded. With some degree of alarm, they saw advancing towards them a young man, who, when he perceived them, stopped, and in an abrupt manner demanded their business.

"We are travellers," replied Claude, "and, having missed our path, are desirous of finding shelter for a few hours."

The young man uttered an exclamation of surprise. "How!" cried he, "am I deceived, or is it actually Claude Emars to whom I speak!"

Claude at the same moment recognised in the person before him his friend Belcastel, and to the no small relief of Alix she beheld the young student under whose protection she had quitted the abbey of St. Germain des Prés.

"Truly," exclaimed the student, "we meet in strange circumstances; and this is a bad time and place for explanation; tell me at once, are you, as I suppose, fugitives

like myself, if so I may be able to serve you." In as few words as possible Claude explained their situation.

"Is it so?" said Belcastel, "I must, then, endeavour to provide for you as well as for myself. Enter this hut with me, and when we are once under shelter I will let you know my plans."

They followed him accordingly through a low doorway, and found the hut uninhabited; carefully fastening the entrance with a rusted iron bolt, Belcastel conducted them through several small rooms, to a flight of steps, and descending they found themselves in a vaulted cave, round which were piled, or lay in confusion, some empty casks, a circumstance that seemed to indicate its having been the abode of smugglers, who then, as in latter times, abounded on the coast.

Belcastel informed Alix, that when he so abruptly quitted her in the crowd to assist his companions, he had entered into a violent contention with those sent against them; that, after a severe struggle, his party had been overpowered, and he amongst the rest taken prisoner.

"We were," said he, "hurried off to the prisons belonging to the Abbey; and considering the tender mercies others had received, I confess I did not expect to escape easily, and was surprised, after some days' confinement, to receive an order for my departure, and my punishment mitigated to banishment. I was commanded to quit Paris instantly, on pain of death, and was left to choose my road, which I discovered to be the case with many of my fellow students, who, like me, were not natives of the capital. We resolved to join our small aid to assist the Rochellois, — in fine, our party is now only waiting a fitting opportunity to make their wishes known to the besieged."

Claude eagerly inquired their number, and learned that it amounted to thirteen.

"We conceal ourselves separately," said Belcastel, "for fear of drawing attention to our numbers; and we find this wood so proper for our purpose, that I, who am named chief of the band, feel myself another Robert le Diable, able to contend with the whole world."

Claude recounted their meeting with the party which

had caused so much alarm in the camp, and when he mentioned the report of Montgomery's arrival with succours, Belcastel's joy knew no bounds.

"This is indeed good news," exclaimed he, "although I fear there has been scarcely time; however, we will hope the best. What that troop might be, I cannot imagine; but there may be treachery, for I know several of the adverse party have employed spies. Meantime, I am most fortunate in gaining you as an ally, and in affording protection to this lady."

While he spoke, a signal was heard, and one by one different members of the band arrived, in order to consult as to their future movements; they welcomed Claude, who was known to several, with much cordiality.

"We must wait for the arrival of Philippe," said Belcastel; "doubtless he will be here to-night, and the intelligence he may have procured can direct us; meantime, let us beguile the time in relating to our new companion our escapes, and the perils we have encountered."

CHAPTER XII.

DIFFICULTIES.

. . . "Are you content
To make a virtue of necessity
And live, as we do, in this wilderness?" — SHAKSPEARE.

"COME, Mathurin," said Belcastel, "let us hear the remainder of the story you were telling us. Claude will be glad to know what became of his friend the Cordelier, who was rescued by him from our impertinence on a late occasion; though he little thought, any more than ourselves, who he was."

"Yes," said Mathurin, "and he perhaps is not aware either that the man whose life he saved from the boatmen and who swam over the river, was the same."

"I had some idea of it," replied Claude; "there was something in the manner of that man which interested me

in no slight degree ; and, in spite of his change of dress, I imagined that he was not an entire stranger to me."

"Well," continued Mathurin, "after he reached the other side of the river, he made the best of his way to the Rue St. Jacques, and came straight to our house. We were very glad to see him ; for my wife had suffered much fear on his account, as we more than suspected him to be a Huguenot.

"'It is lucky,' said Clarice, 'that you have not again appeared in your monk's frock ; for Crucé, the butcher, has been here, making many inquiries after you, and we had some trouble to get him away.'

"'My good friends,' said our lodger, 'it is useless any longer to attempt concealment : I am one of those marked out for destruction, and must escape as well as I can. I will but take some papers from my room above, and will bid you farewell.'

"He hurried up-stairs, and was scarcely gone, when a tap at our door startled my wife, who had grown very timid.

"'If this should be an enemy,' said she, 'to our poor gentleman, what shall we do?'

"I could not think of any thing ; so we opened the door, and who should enter but the little dwarf Ancelin, whom my Clarice particularly detested ; for he was always hovering about, and used to make love to her,—a deformed idiot ! before we were married.

"'Oh ! ho !' said he, 'Madame Lussaut, you look so snug and comfortable here, that one longs to be of the party. Will you give me a draught of wine, for I am tired to death ?'

"Clarice, who thought it best to be civil, answered by fetching him a draught : and we saw, with great annoyance, that our troublesome neighbour intended to pay us a long visit, for he seated himself quite as one of the family, and began to talk.

"'This is a sad business,' said he. 'My heart bleeds for these poor people ; for, though they are Huguenots and heretics, still, you know, they are flesh and blood, and Frenchmen. I am told there are a good many concealed

about since the massacre began; and indeed, to tell truth, my good friends, that Cordelier whom you harbour is a suspected character; and I advise you to make a friend of me, and tell me if he is in the house now, that we may get him away,—for you will scarcely be safe if Captain Crucé finds him.'

"I was taken in, for the moment, by the little wretch's plausible manner, and was on the point of speaking the truth; but Clarice interfered, and replied:—

"'It is very strange what is become of our lodger: for these three days there has been no news of him, and I dare say, he has gone back to his convent at Lyons.'

"'Oh! at Lyons?' said the dwarf. 'That was his story, was it? No such thing. He is a Huguenot; and more.—I know who he is,—neither more nor less than the Count de Montgomery, who killed King Henry in the tournament. Now the Queen-mother will give a reward of a hundred gold crowns to whoever will deliver him up; and he is, therefore, not very likely to escape. You and I, Lussaut,' added the ugly hypocrite, 'are above a bribe; but I wouldn't say as much for Crucé, though he is my friend: and if he should suspect——'

"'Suppose he should,' interrupted Clarice, speaking loud—for she heard the step of our lodger on the stair, 'he would not find him here, for the reason I told you; and as for being the Count de Montgomery, he is too good a Catholic,—for the whole floor where he sleeps is covered with bits of the rod with which he flogs himself every morning.'

"The dwarf grinned. 'Who,' said he suddenly, 'was the man that entered your shop just now? I thought it was the tiler Edmond, and Montault told me he wanted some slates mended on the roof of his house.'

"'No,' said Clarice, carelessly filling his glass; 'it was Petit Jacques, who is come after my *mules* to mend.'

"'Indeed,' said Ancelin; 'then I will wait till he comes down, since he is working up stairs in your house; for I saw him go up.'

"This resolve greatly disconcerted us, for we saw the deceitful wretch had some design in his pertinacity. How-

ever, Clarice made me a sign to attract his attention while she left the room, and, hurrying up-stairs, met our lodger, who was descending. She bade him return, and then told him of her fears, and for whom he was taken. He assured her he would be on his guard; that he would sell his life dear, that he was indeed Montgomery, and did not fear to trust her with the secret, in spite of the reward offered for betraying him. She bade him rely on her presence of mind, and not to stir till she let him know the dwarf was gone, but that did not seem a thing likely soon to happen; for he stayed and stayed till all the wine was drunk, and getting rather heated he began to show his real intentions.

"'Now, Lussaut,' said he, 'there is no use in your trying to hide the truth; and, after all, since a man has to make his fortune in this wicked world, it matters little how he does it. A hundred gold crowns are worth having; and if we could find this Huguenot, we were sure of it, and might share it between us without making Crucé the wiser.'

"I felt inclined to knock the treacherous villain on the head; but Clarice was more prudent, and, before I could speak, she answered,—

"'Well,—but how are we to get at him? I tell you he has been away these three days.

"'He is upstairs at this moment,' said the dwarf; 'Petit Jacques is in his shop busy at work, never dreaming of you and your high heels. Let me go up softly and seize him; give me some rope, and between us we can bind him fast till I give information. We will shut the door of the shop; you, Clarice, can watch in case Crucé should arrive, and amuse him if he does.'

"Seeing that there was no help for it, I pretended to enter into the scheme, stipulating for half the reward, which Ancelin readily promised, then, taking some cord, I led the way up the narrow stairs to the room were our lodger lay. I knew he was a powerful man, and with my help I was sure we could master the dwarf, and he might escape. Accordingly, as we entered, I closed the door in haste, and before Ancelin had time to turn round, I seized him, and

calling to the Count, told him how the matter stood, and bade him help to gag and bind the little wretch, and then fly for his life. This we effected, but with great difficulty, as he was strong and furious, and made great resistance; however, at last, he was tightly bound, and we fastened him to a pillar of wood, which supported the roof, and down stairs we went. The Count loaded us with thanks, and gave us his purse and a valuable ring in spite of our remonstrances.

"'I shall endeavour to reach the coast,' said he, 'and fly, if possible, to England. Should you suffer persecution on my account, let La Rochelle be your refuge, where I trust myself to return. Farewell, and Heaven be with you!'

"We thought all was now safe, but, just as Clarice was opening the door, to our horror we saw the figure of Crucé close before us.

"'Well met!' said he; 'have you seen the dwarf Ancelin?'

"'He is just gone,' replied Clarice, quickly, 'to the Bel Image; and left word that he would meet you there, as he had something of consequence to inform you of.'

"'Who are you, comrade?' asked the butcher to our lodger, who had kept in the shade. 'Why don't you come forward? If you are an honest man and a good Catholic, there's plenty of work to do yet, and the pestilent Huguenots swarm still.'

"We saw that the ruffian was suspicious, and Clarice had need of all her wit. 'He's deaf,' said she, 'never heed him, he hears you not: Ancelin will be impatient till you come; he told me to let you know he waits. Here Jean,' she added, handing the Count a pitcher, and speaking very loud, 'take this and go to the fountain, and mind you make haste back.'

"Our lodger took the pitcher and was hurrying past Crucé, when he laid his great heavy hand on his shoulder and detained him.

"'Stop, mon drole!' he cried, grinning as he spoke; 'you depart not before I look in your face; a hundred gold crowns shall not so easily slip through my fingers.'

"In an instant the Count shook off his hold, and drawing a pistol from his girdle, fired it at the butcher. As quickly he lifted his arm to dash it on one side, and received the discharge in his shoulder; in spite of which, he grappled with Montgomery, and they struggled hard, while Crucé exerted his tremendous voice calling for his friends without. The Count was close to the door which Clarice held open. I attempted to force myself between the butcher and his intended victim, who, with a violent effort, dashed him to the earth and sprang into the street. At that moment a party came running towards us with drawn swords, streaming with blood: I saw there was nothing to be done, but to escape with my wife. I darted out, bidding her follow me, which she did, shutting the door on Crucé, who lay stunned against the wall within. The Count, making us a sign, rushed down the first opening, and we lost him in a moment. I hurried on, crying out loudly,—'Who will gain a hundred gold crowns? The Count de Montgomery is in yonder house, bound above,—hasten, or you will be too late.'

"This was enough; the miscreants rushed forward,—I saw them enter my shop, and felt our lives were all that we could hope to save. Therefore, almost carrying my poor wife, on I went as fast as I could run, leaving my property to chance.

"Our hope was to reach the Quai de la Vallée, and the Hôtel d'Hercule, where Marion, my wife's aunt, lived with Nantouillet the Prévôt; and we thought we could get help from him, and soldiers to protect my poor shop, if it was not too late.

"As we went along, suddenly a cavalcade of gay court ladies and gallants came riding by; and while we were trying to avoid them, we saw the Prévôt walking along before us. He seemed flurried and agitated, and when he looked up and saw the party he suddenly took to his heels, and ran off as fast as we did. I heard one of the ladies, who was very handsome and bold-looking, say to one of the cavaliers, "It is that knave Nantouillet! It would be a good deed to ride over the miserly craven! All laughed and applauded, and, to our dismay, the fierce

horsewoman dashed the spurs into her steed's sides, and directed him right against the Prévôt,—calling out as she did so,—

"'Out of the way, saucy groom! Leave the way clear for your betters!'

"So saying she rode furiously forward. The Prévôt was thrown down in an instant beneath her horse's feet, and she dashed on, laughing heartily, being joined by her companions, who all followed, allowing me hardly time to drag the unfortunate man out of the road.*

"'Alas!' said Nantouillet, when he could speak, 'this is the vengeance of that vixen Châteauneuf! I must fly from Paris; there is no safety here for me now.'

"'Are you hurt, sir?' I inquired.

"'Much bruised,' said he; 'but I can walk, my house is only a few steps from hence; but for your timely aid I had been minced by their horses' feet. I thought they had done enough when they pillaged my hotel and destroyed my goods!'

"We led him to the hotel, which we found a scene of desolation impossible to describe; everything torn to pieces, the doors and windows off their hinges, the arras hanging in rags, and the walls broken and defaced. He related to us the event, which you all know of, the Feast of the Three Kings, which had cost him so dear, and when I recounted my misadventure he offered us his protection as fellow-sufferers. He sent to the other authorities, and ordered some troops to go to the Rue St. Jacques, as there had been strict orders issued anew, that the Huguenots were not to be molested further; but, alas! my shop had been entirely pillaged—every thing was gone; they found the mob in possession, and sitting on the window-sill above, enjoying the devastation, was the little dwarf Ancelin, his crooked legs dangling down, and his frightful face distorted with laughter as he pelted the soldiers with logs of wood, which he had found in my grange, where he had been bound. I rejoice to say, however, that he met his fate; for one of the men, irritated at the insolence he displayed, and finding that there was no other way to disperse the crowd, fired

* On record.

amongst them, and taking aim at the dwarf as he sat gibbering there, brought him down a corpse to the pavement. What became of Crucé I have no idea; all I know is, that finding myself a ruined man I accepted Nantouillet's offer, and with Clarice and Marion accompanied him to Normandy, and leaving my wife in the care of her aunt, I resolved to join the *malcontents*, as we Catholics who have been ill-treated, and ask for redress, are called. Why we should be otherwise than ill-content, I know not; and as the Huguenots have a common cause with us, I joined this band of gentlemen, and shall be glad enough when we can reach La Rochelle, and begin to show our enemies what men can do who have wrongs to avenge and wives to protect."

"And where," said Belcastel, "is Nantouillet now?"

"In Normandy," returned Lussaut; "safe, I hope; but a poor man to what he was. He will never be fond of fine court-gallants again, as he once was, for they have ruined him entirely."

"His nephew Philippe will be here anon," said Belcastel; "he was forced to fly with us, and is now one of our most useful spies;—surely, I hear his signal."

As he spoke, a low whistle was heard. Silence was instantly established, and a voice without demanded admission in the name of St. Nicholas, for a wayfarer bewildered in his journey. Belcastel smiled, and hastening up the steps of the cave he opened the door to an aged man, whom he ushered into the cottage with much precaution; he was immediately presented to Claude and Alix, as Philippe their trusty spy, who could, doubtless, give the latest tidings from the camp.

"I can," answered his companion; "for I have but now parted with the Duke of Anjou himself, and in my character of astrologer have learned much more than I have taught; though my predictions have given so much satisfaction, that Ruggieri himself, or even the prince of prophets, Nostrodamus, could not have been more honoured. Our common purse has been well-filled in consequence, and we must now endeavour, as quickly as possible, to give intelligence to our friends the Rochellois. There is a project

on foot to destroy the pipes leading to the great fountain in the town, and there are even wretches who have proposed to poison the water: this ought to be known without delay, as it is of the utmost consequence that measures should be taken to prevent it. Intelligence has just been received in the camp of the state of La Rochelle, through a spy who had been imprudently admitted into the town, and who has found means to evade the vigilance of La Nouë. I met him and a party but now, hurrying to carry their information where it would be welcome. His name is Thibauderie, a traitor Huguenot, who, won by gold, has betrayed his friends. Fortunately, the salt-marshes, where no cannon can be placed, greatly guard the besieged; if they could but receive succour by sea all would be right, but I fear greatly the success of Montgomery's entreaties. He is, however, arrived in England and may do much."

"Thank Heaven for that good news!" exclaimed several of the party.

"Elizabeth of England, unluckily," continued Philippe, "seems but lukewarm in our favour, and the Catholic party exult in the hope that her policy will keep her quiet. The most important intelligence I have, however, is that an assault is to be made to-morrow on the town. We have no time to lose, and had better attempt to enter La Rochelle before morning, when, if we can give warning of the intention, we shall do good service. But though your friend Claude, here," continued the speaker, "may serve us in good stead, what is to be done with the lady?"

"Let me accompany you," exclaimed Alix; "for pity's sake! I have no fears which will make me a troublesome companion; and my strength will enable me to endure all fatigues, so I but escape from the foes I leave behind. I have relations in La Rochelle, and trust I may be enabled to be of use. My uncle is De Hommet." She was interrupted by an exclamation from Belcastel, whose cheek and brow were suffused with crimson, as he turned away to propose some arrangement for their intended expedition.

It was agreed that they should sally forth in a body from the wood under favour of the night, and make for the river side, Belcastel guiding them, when, should they find the

means to cross to the opposite shore, they must bend their course to the marshes of Marans, and attempt to enter the town by that way. However uncertain and hazardous the adventure, they had no alternative, and all being hastily arranged, Alix, supported by Claude, walked in the centre of the small band, and they began their march.

The night was very dark, and with the utmost difficulty they pursued their way till the banks of the river were gained. Here an unthought-of obstacle presented itself: the stream was not deep, and their only means of passing was by fording it, a method little difficult to young adventurers, determined as they were, and most of them accustomed to a hardy life among their native torrents and mountains; but for Alix this was impossible, and Claude heard their consultations almost with despair. Alix herself, seeing the predicament in which they were placed, exerted all her resolution, and in a firm voice bade them not consider her as a burthen on their undertaking, as, with the assistance of Claude, whose further protection she entreated, she hoped to be able to reach the opposite bank without attempting the mode they would adopt. She knew the country perfectly, having visited her uncle there, and proposed Claude's assuming the habit of the pretended astrologer, who had lately been so successful in the camp, and she would accompany him as an attendant. Her advice was without delay followed, and the transformation of Claude soon completed. He received from the student a volume of the centuries of Nostrodamus, and several hints as to the proper mode of sustaining his character.

Alix bound her white veil in many folds round her head in the form of a turban, and covered her face with it as much as possible. The large mantle she wore concealed her figure, and, thus equipped, they took their way together along the river side, having agreed upon a signal of recognition, and that the other party should wait for them as long as their safety would permit, when the passage had been accomplished.

The night was far advanced when Alix and Claude reached the foot of the bridge, and, being challenged by the sentinel, Claude announced himself as a poor professor

of medicine and astrology, travelling with his daughter, to visit a sick relation at Marans.

"You have a dark night for your journey," said the sentinel, "and a cursed country to go through."

"We mediciners must not consider that," replied Claude: "we go in all weathers and through all dangers to visit the sick. I have come some leagues already, for I left the camp this morning, where I did not like to leave my daughter, so I brought her with me; and it is a long tramp for her: would you let us rest awhile in this hut, for we are footsore?"

"No," said the sentinel, "you can't stop here. My relief will soon come I hope; and I must not be seen parleying,—what's the news from the camp? Are we to attack these heretics soon, or cool our heels outside the town till doomsday?"

"I hear," said Claude, "there is to be an attack to-morrow; and as the besieged have no hint of such a thing, we are sure to take their paltry town at the first assault."

"Stop," said the sentinel, who seemed anxious to amuse his solitude by a little gossip; "have you seen Mitaine and Frezaie?* Oh! such glorious guns! They have only to look at the walls once, and the next glance they will be blown in the air. It does one's heart good to hear Frezaie screech! she is the sweetest vixen you ever saw. Now, some think her not equal to Mitaine; but, though she has a double barrel, her noise isn't so loud or so fine, in my mind."

"We are well provided with pieces," said Claude confidentially. "Now, how many do you think we have?"

"Why, I heard but now," returned the soldier, "Birón has just received thirty-six pieces for the battery, three hundred thousand pounds of powder; and to-day the foot and cavalry he expects must be come."

"Oh, they are! they are!" said Claude, anxious to put an end to the colloquy, yet fearful of appearing in haste to leave the spot. "Well, good night, comrade. I

* Two cannons so called by the soldiery at the period. One is described as having a double barrel.

wish we had your post instead of this long dark walk before us."

"You need not envy me: it is solitary enough here," returned the sentinel. "I wish I was with the party who are gone to the attack of La Grimenaudière to-night, that old house by the road-side you know."

"St. Nicholas defend us!" said Claude, feigning alarm: "that is just in our route. Heaven send we meet them not! Who defends the old house?"

"Why, as for that, Captain Virolet had settled to betray it to us; but, if that meddling fool, Le Normand, arrives, he will try to defend it in good earnest; and there may be smart work," answered the talkative sentinel.

Claude, not sorry to have obtained this important information, took leave of the soldier; and congratulating himself and his trembling companion on their good fortune, continued their way. The moon began to rise, and they found less difficulty in proceeding; but the nature of the ground was so peculiar that they feared the least deviation from the high track they were following might involve them in danger. Far and wide on every side stretched beneath them an extent of marsh, intersected by canals, cut for drainage, and for the transport of wood and other necessaries from one place to another. As the season had been dry they were less dangerous than usual; but, to persons unacquainted with the country, they presented a formidable appearance; and it was with unexpected delight that they beheld, after several leagues of toilsome exertion, the towers of La Rochelle at no great distance, and the party of Belcastel before them.

Claude was greatly surprised to find that the party of Belcastel was increased by a small body of soldiers; this explained the firing which had alarmed them just before: it appeared that the friendly troops had been set upon by an ambush, and but for the timely aid of the students would have been worsted. They were now all on their way to the town in triumph, and were conducted to La Rochelle by the Captain Le Normand and his men, not only as friends, but with grateful acknowledgments for the assistance chance had enabled them to render. Some

caution, however, was necessary, and after a brief examination the large party was detained awhile at the gates till the captain could give information of their circumstances. Alix proposed to establish the truth of their statements by repairing immediately with Claude only, accompanied by a sufficient guard, to the house of De Hommet, who held a post of importance in the magistracy. Her request was agreed to, and with as little delay as possible she proceeded to execute her commission. The astonishment of her uncle on beholding her was only equalled by the delight of her cousin Lesselline. As briefly as possible she related her situation, and claiming the protection of his roof for herself and her deliverer, she entreated his interference to secure the good reception of her friends the students by the citizens of La Rochelle.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FABLE.

"A fine volley of words, gentlemen, and quickly shot off." — SHAKSPEARE.

THE report which so much encouraged the Rochellois, that a fleet was arriving from England to assist them, under the conduct of the Count de Montgomery, was unfortunately untrue. With incredible difficulty he had reached the coast, and crossed the sea in an open boat to Dover; but his hopes were greatly damped on his arrival, for he found that Elizabeth was extremely anxious to preserve the peace of the two countries, and was but lukewarm in her expressed indignation at the recent cruelties practised in France on the Protestants.

Contrary to her usual professions, the Queen appeared to have set her mind on concluding a treaty of marriage proposed for her with the Duke d'Alençon, now, in consequence of his brother's appointment to the kingdom of Poland, called the Duke d'Anjou. Although the Prince was twenty-one years younger than his proposed bride, and was far from possessing claims to that personal beauty

which she so much admired, yet she appeared determined to make him her husband, and heard with indignation and anger all remonstrances on the subject. The news of the frightful events which had just occurred had for a time put a stop to the question, and the horror and disgust of the people of England were so openly avowed, that her ministers, supported by the French Protestants, to whom the Duke was believed to be friendly, were obliged to let it sleep for the present, much to the annoyance of the Queen, who, on this occasion, appeared to have thrown aside her usual prudence and good sense, and to have abandoned herself to a foolish and imaginary passion, which she was resolved at all risks should not be opposed.

The persecuted Huguenots had fled in great numbers to England, and Montgomery found no difficulty in collecting either men or money to assist him. In Plymouth and Falmouth he had secured a numerous fleet ready to act, if he could procure a ratification of the promises held out to him by the English Council; but delay after delay kept him in continued agitation, and he knew that in the meantime his friends at La Rochelle were anxiously looking for his aid. Messengers and deputies continued to arrive, urging him to set sail, and still no positive permission was given him to do so.

While things remained in this state Elizabeth had despatched the Earl of Worcester to Paris, to stand proxy for her to the daughter of Charles IX., and it had been secretly agreed that the young Duke should pay her a visit incognito. This it was said had taken place, and numerous were the stories circulated respecting the interviews, which appeared so satisfactory to both parties, that great fears were entertained by the people that the project of giving them a Catholic King would succeed.

Meantime the mind of Catherine de Medicis was harassed by contending desires: a sea of troubles seemed to be tossing beneath her, and she saw that it required all her resolution to stem the torrent. To pacify the English, amuse the Queen, and gain her good-will, was her first consideration. The extravagant luxury which she had long encouraged at Court had impoverished the royal

treasury; and to undertake a war with any of their allies was a ruinous measure, which she saw the necessity of avoiding. At the same time, so great was her hatred towards the Protestants, and so enraged was she on finding that the Count de Montgomery had effected his escape, and was now preparing assistance for the revolted Rochellois, that she resolved to fix on some notable scheme, which should strike a great blow in England, where she held intelligence with a strong Catholic party, who assured her that the people in general, and the greater part of the nobles, would gladly receive Mary Stuart for their Queen, if Elizabeth could be removed. Catherine had frequently reflected on the words which René had dropped; and she began to think it possible to act upon them. She summoned, therefore, her favourite counsellor and the creature of her will, the Marshal de Retz; and the result of her consultation was, that he should be sent ambassador to Queen Elizabeth to negotiate a loan, and to prevent succours being given to those of La Rochelle by every means in the power of flattery, falsehood, and treachery to effect.

The Duke de Retz was a man eminently fitted for such a purpose. Of low birth and infamous character, his talents had raised him to his present rank, together with his entire devotion to his mistress, to whose congenial spirit his own responded; and as neither honour nor faith stood in the way of his ambition, her unscrupulous policy exactly suited his designs.

"Go, then, De Retz," said Catherine; "let your appointments be such as to sustain our dignity and to dazzle the eyes of those proud islanders; and be careful to practise every art to cajole the vain woman who thinks by her superior cunning to outwit her allies. Her foible is vanity,—be it your care to make her believe that she is adored in France, that the reputation of her beauty has raised an enthusiastic feeling in her favour; insinuate that Anjou is dying for her love, and the King and myself desire her alliance beyond all other considerations. She is rich, and her gold must be obtained for our necessities; but pique her pride so as to prevent her listening to the

representations of De Lorges to induce her to help La Rochelle. There are many Catholic noblemen who will be ready to assist you in any plan for her downfal; and let not the injury sleep of that attack on the Earl of Worcester's vessels, in his voyage to France, to stand proxy for her for my grand-child. Insinuate that Montgomery knew of it, and that those piratical ships were employed by the Rochellois to seize the treasure which Worcester brought over as a present. Bianco shall accompany you, and you will find his wit of infinite service. To you and him I leave the whole business, and doubt not but I shall hail your success, as I have always hitherto done, in any great emergency. My plans are well laid; it remains to perfect them. All the leaders of the two parties are before La Rochelle, and are in my power, in case of the necessity of acting against any of them; and, if Elizabeth can be kept quiet, I do not despair of seeing the whole of that swarm of Huguenot locusts swept from the earth."

"Doubt it not, madam," replied De Retz; "all shall be done as your wisdom has directed, and there is no reason to dread failure, while three such heads as your Grace's, René's and my own, are busy planning for the good of France."

As soon as De Retz was dismissed the Queen ordered Bianco to her presence, and informed him of her intentions.

"Madonna," said he, "I undertake the task with great readiness. Is not this Queen of England proud of her riding?"

"She is," said Catherine; "but why the question?"

"It would be well," said René, smiling, "to present her with a saddle of extraordinary beauty, — the leather and linings carefully embroidered under my directions. We will make it gorgeous to sight, and convenient beyond all her savage workmen can accomplish. If she uses it frequently, her health may probably feel a change, — for the better, as regards our cause."

Catherine's countenance expressed her satisfaction as she commended the quickness of his invention.

"I have several friends whom I can trust," he continued, "who had better accompany me; some whom your Grace has known of old; and there is one who would fain be employed again in your service. He is but lately returned to Paris, after a long absence, and did good service in the late business."

"Who is it?" said Catherine. "I want faithful servants, and will reward them."

"He is one whom your Grace will remember by this token," said René, producing a ring, which he gave her.

Catherine's face became pale as ashes as she gazed upon the jewel, and sinking back in her seat, she gasped for breath. René watched her with some surprise, and saw her features working with suppressed agony. She looked several times at the ring, and at length uttered, in an agitated voice, —

"René,—is he who gave you this in Paris?"

"Yes, Madonna," he replied; "it is Captain Florio, who tells me your Grace employed him many years since, and he trusts again to serve you."

"Does he demand to see me?" said Catherine, in a subdued voice.

"He entreats it," replied René.

"Strange!" said Catherine: "then he still lives! I heard he was condemned to the galleys for some discovered deed."

"Even so," replied her confidant; "but he escaped most miraculously; and since then, — for he is very pious, — he has for some years lived a life of seclusion as a hermit in Auvergne, practising the greatest austerities, and setting an example to the whole district. By degrees some of his old associates found him out, and he persuaded several more to join in his mode of life; till at length, a rich merchant passing near the hermitage begged shelter for the night; and the sight of his jewels, bales, and well-filled purse, overcame the philosophy of the holy men, and they transferred those treasures to their own possession, — providing the respectable ex-owner with a decent dwelling beneath the flooring of their cell. As he was now well stored, he and his companions resolved to seek a wider

field for their zeal and benevolence; and quitting the scene of their pious choice, visited some of the most celebrated cities of Europe, and finally arrived in Paris, where I renewed my acquaintance with them; and Florio has intrusted me with this to revive your Grace's ancient consideration of him. He it was who informed me that the Count de Montgomery was to be found here in disguise; and he had nearly accomplished the purpose we have at heart, to remove him from your path, but his star triumphed, and he escaped."

"Would that I could annihilate his whole race with himself!" exclaimed Catherine; "but he has sons;—the line stretches on;—why did they not all perish, like his first-born? I tell you, René, all I ever hoped and sought is nothing if I behold not that man at my feet, if I see not that traitor's head roll on the scaffold. I would not have him die by ordinary means; I would enjoy the triumph, after years of disappointment, of knowing that he perished by the hand of the executioner,—his name and fame blasted, and his race outcasts and beggars!"

"Madonna," said René, "be of good cheer; all that you have this instant named I have beheld in your fate. It is decreed that you shall see this. The stars that speak to me each night of you, reveal that when the crown of Poland is exchanged for that of France, Montgomery's blood shall flow; but there is a price which must be paid for this——"

"Name it, Bianco," cried the Queen; "what price too large for such combined happiness?"

"If Henry reigns he will be the last of his race," said Bianco, mysteriously.

Catherine shuddered. "And Navarre succeeds?" asked she, as if she consulted an oracle.

"Navarre is not immortal," suggested René. "If Marguerite lives, he cannot break his marriage with her; they must continue foes and meet but as such, and we have yet time before us to contend with fortune."

"True, René," said she; "Henry of Navarre is volatile, and loves not my daughter; there is no fear of that. Charles withers daily—we must be careful of him—"

she added the last words in a low whisper with a significant smile, which René understood. "But to the purpose. I will see Florio; you shall yourself conduct him at midnight to my observatory tower by the private way, and we will then speak of all that it is requisite to do in this expedition. But," she added, endeavouring to shake off a weight that oppressed her, "what news have you of your runaway mistress?"

The brow of René lowered as he answered, "I cannot discover the least trace of her; the President has retired to his new domain in Anjou, with a heart bleeding with sorrow for his child's loss; my rival has escaped — would I could discover how! Is there no means, Madonna, to put me in his Grace's favour? it would much assist our projects were I nearer to him."

"I will contrive it, René," said the indulgent mistress; "depend on me. Charles is as whimsical as he is passionate, and if you appear for a time out of my favour he will take you into his; we will see to this. The hour of audience is arrived — I see my ladies coming — let all guests be admitted as usual. Montgaillard was to visit us; after his late adventure it will be diverting to hear him, and Ruggieri is to attend me: therefore, René, be gay, for we must banish all gloom before the world, and seem as if frivolity was native to us."

So saying, she prepared to give admission to the Queen of Navarre, and to her usual attendants and guests, and in a few moments all was cheerfulness and gaiety, and Catherine, to outward eyes, the most amused and happy there.

The affair of the attack on the monastery of St. Germain des Prés had made considerable noise in Paris, and the part acted in it by the Petit Feuillant had excited great merriment and derision; so ill-used had he been, and so much was the delicacy of his appearance injured, that, for some weeks, he was unable to quit his bed. On the morning when he first ventured to reappear, smiles greeted him wherever he came, but they were far other than those he desired to meet. Irritated at this reception, and throwing all the blame of the adventure on La Mole's desertion

of him at the moment of need, he resolved to revenge himself by no longer keeping the secret with which he had been intrusted.

The Queen-mother and the ladies of La Petite Bande were amusing themselves with listening to the sallies of René and Ruggieri, the former having been careful to attend to the hint which had fallen from his royal mistress, their wit being generally directed to the annoyance of each other. The arrival of Montgaillard promised a mine of fresh repartee; as his *présence d'esprit* was remarkable, and he was just now a fit subject for ridicule, René, with a countenance of assumed concern, hastened to meet the monk, whose natural defect in his gait was far from improved by his late misadventure. He introduced him with much affected ceremony, and offered his support to conduct the Petit Feuillant to the feet of the Queen and her ladies.

"How fares it with you, reverend father?" said Catherine, "your illness has so long deprived us of amusement, that we hail your return amongst us, widowed and forsaken as we all now are, with infinite pleasure."

"Your Grace," said Montgaillard, who had resolved to endure all the pleasantry levelled at him as equably as he might, "is ever kind and complimentary; and I would willingly endure a thousand such misfortunes as that which has lately been my lot, to be greeted on my return with smiles from such fair beings as those around me."

"Surely," said the beautiful De Sauves, "we must all appear to strange disadvantage after your visit to the Lady of the Lake."

"What news, reverend sir," said René, "from the world of waters? Did your occult learning enable you to understand the language of the fishes? if so, pray let us know their opinion of passing events."

Much tittering and ill-suppressed laughter followed these speeches; but Montgaillard joined heartily in the merriment, and turning to René, replied—

"I heard," said he, "of an affair which had caused some sensation in the finny court, and I crave leave to relate it, as it bears much resemblance to scenes passing in

our own world; a circumstance which proves to me that there is little novelty under the sun, since, however deep we may dive to obtain it, it eludes our grasp. It seems, that the beautiful princess of the scaly tribe had a dogfish, whom she entertained as her fool, and to whom she was much attached. Wishing to pleasure her favourite, she bestowed on him a young mermaiden to whom he was to be united with great ceremony, when a huge shark, who had taken a fancy to the object of his devotions, one day when she was combing her golden tresses on a rock, snapped her up and swam off with his prey. He had been assisted by a dolphin, who guided them to his palace beneath the waves, where the mermaiden was kept a close prisoner. A party of swordfish attacked his mansion, and stole away the prize, who was thus snatched from the grasp of the shark, and the foolish dogfish also, who, quite ignorant of the author of his vexation, went shaking his bells up and down the court, and crying to his mistress for help, to no purpose. Now, the dolphin, had he pleased, could have pointed out the proper object of his vengeance, yet was he stupid enough to treat him with impertinence, and thus deprive himself of the necessary knowledge."

"How?" said Catherine; "methinks I should like to know what had become of the shark."

"He was sent, please your Grace," continued the Petit Feuillant, "to devour a shoal of herrings, who had risen against the state; and so concealed his loss, leaving all the blame and ridicule of the adventure with the much-injured and friendly dolphin."

"Explain, explain;" cried Catherine impatiently.—"Your riddle wearies me. Who is this shark, and who is this tedious dolphin?"

"The first," answered he, "is my lord La Mole, and the second is my unworthy self; who, in assisting what I conceived to be an innocent folly of that gentleman's, have exposed myself to irreverent treatment, and the ridicule of the fair."

"La Mole!" exclaimed Marguerite of Navarre. "Is it possible?"

"René," said the Queen, laughing, "your sagacity has been for once deceived, and your Huguenot rival is, after all, not the culprit. Ruggieri, did not your prescience desert you when you bade our deceived swain look that way?"

"The learned astrologer," said Montgaillard, "had his sight not been dazzled by a recent discovery of the philosopher's stone, in which he was assisted by the accomplished chevalier in question, — would better have interpreted the language of the stars."

Ruggieri bit his lip and was silent. The two Italians looked at each other with no very cordial glances; both, however, endeavoured to conceal their feelings; and an indifferent observer would have augured little mischief from their demeanour towards each other. Catherine, however, who well knew the dispositions of each, was aware of the probable consequences of this discovery, and resolved to turn the attention of those present into a more agreeable channel.

"Montgaillard," said she, familiarly, "your voice has so long been unheard amongst us that we have almost forgotten the sound of sweet music. Sing, we pray thee, some ditty to revive our memories. René, tune yonder lute, that you may accompany our reverend melodist."

The Petit Feuillant smiled, well-pleased to be invited to exhibit his favourite accomplishment; and, looking with a languishing air at the ladies, he sang a new villanelle, by Desportes, the gay and lively poet, whose songs were the passion of the moment.

VILLANELLE.

Rosette, methinks the time was short
I left you here alone;
But soon your eye fresh fancies caught,
And straight your heart was gone!
And I so well am taught by you
To laugh at ev'ry vow,
That I have learnt to wander too,
And love another now.
'Tis not strange
We should range,
Like the bee that flutters by:
Time will show
Which shall know
First repentance — you or I.

While I, in painful absence crost,
Was weeping both our woes,
You, chary of the time we lost,
A newer lover chose!
No vane at every zephyr's sigh
Can veer so quickly round;
None loved you once so well as I,
And none so false I found.
'Tis but fair
I should share
Both your truth and falsehood too.
Time will show
Which shall know
First repentance — I or you.

"Your song is more agreeable than your news, Montgaillard," said Catherine. "René, you must forgive Cosmo this little piece of treachery; you know he is the bosom friend of La Mole; and, to a friend, how could he refuse his aid?"

"I swear to you, René," said Cosmo aside, "the Petit Feuillant is malicious. I had no idea of La Mole's intention of carrying off your bride; nor do I now believe it. Besides, how could she be conveyed to the camp, or kept there without creating scandal? It is an invention of the spiteful monk."

"My dear friend," answered René, "I cannot for a moment suppose it to be true. Pray be not uneasy on account of this business. I saw your zeal in my cause, and I appreciate it."

This was said on both sides with the intention of quieting the evident anxiety of the Queen-mother, as well as to lull the suspicions which each knew the other entertained. As Ruggieri retired, his rival followed him with one of those glances peculiar to himself; and as he smiled an adieu muttered to himself, "He drinks not always in a Venice glass."

Marguerite of Navarre heard with mortified vanity that one, whom she considered devoted to herself, had dared to conceive a passion for another.

The Queen-mother resolved to turn this discovery to account, as she knew of Charles's lately conceived hatred to La Mole; and by introducing to his observation the wrongs of René she hoped he would make common cause with him, and receive her minion with a greater degree of favour than hitherto. In this she was not deceived.

The King laughed heartily at the whole adventure recounted by his mother, and from that time talked of René with a complacent indulgence, which soon led to a desire to employ him.

It was midnight when Catherine sought her observatory tower, where René was to give admission to Florio, according to her command. The two Italians had been waiting for some time previous to her arrival, and their conversation was not intended for her ear.

"And so you know my mistress," said René, "of old? I can tell you, then, nothing that you are not already acquainted with."

"Why," answered Florio, "you are well aware that I was in her service before the death of her husband."

"Yes," replied René; "but you spoke but now of a time previous to that, and I would fain hear some particulars of her early life, of which fame speaks strange things."

"The time is not yet come for you to know all," replied the Captain, "or you would start at that which I could relate. This much I would conceal from her: she has never recognised you as the son I left in Paris with the old jeweller, and it answers my purpose, as well as your own, that neither she nor others should suspect the connection between us."

"So be it," replied René. "I confess I am not very solicitous to produce my illustrious father to the world."

"But you must provide for him, though?" said Florio.

"That I will willingly do, through Catherine," answered the worthy son. "But you say you have her in your power, and she will refuse you nothing."

"You will see," replied Florio. "My testimony of former days could crush her; and she knows it. You must leave us together, and the result of our conference I will relate to you."

The step of Catherine was heard on the tower stair, and Bianco, sliding softly towards the door, opened it and admitted her. She spoke not a word, but motioning him to withdraw he made haste to obey, and she was left alone in the chamber with Florio. He stood wrapped in

a large mantle, with his broad hat drawn over his brows, and appeared to wait till Catherine opened the conversation.

"You have desired to see me," she said at length; "for what purpose? I thought all ended between us."

"You hoped so," answered he. "You hoped that those you had employed to waylay me on that journey which I took at your instigation, when Anthony of Navarre was to be disposed of, had performed their office. I recognised your hand in that; but I escaped them. I have since been prisoner with the Turk: have spent years in the galleys, and but a short time since was able to reach your capital, where, during the entertainment you gave the people at your daughter's wedding I have done good service to the cause of good Catholics. But I am poor, and want supplies; and though I know myself unwelcome, I have sought you for the purpose of relieving my necessities."

"Here is gold!" said Catherine eagerly. "Take this and fly from Paris. You can do me service yet. You know Montgomery yet lives. René will accompany De Retz to England; and if you accomplish his destruction reward shall not be wanting. Had you succeeded formerly, what years of unsated hatred would have been spared me!"

"His wife, at least, died by my means," said Florio.

"Ay,—and his child!" added Catherine, triumphantly.

"You are mistaken," said the ruffian, deliberately; "his son had been carried off; and though I told you my dagger had reached him, 'twas but a fable."

"How!" cried Catherine, passionately, "dared you to deceive me?"

"I dare do much," replied he; "but I keep back all that suits not my purpose: you know what I could reveal. The Convent of ——"

A fearful shudder came over Catherine; she started up. "Florio," she said, "torture me not. Hear me, and reflect if it is well to carry your imprudence further. Reveal aught of former times to a living creature in France, and my vengeance shall find you though you were hidden in the deepest cavern of the earth. Be secret and silent, and

besides all that my impoverished state allows me to give you, I will procure you a pension, paid by the city of Paris, of which you will be secure for life. Are you content?"

"Perforce," replied her tormentor; "and would you have me go to England, then? It will not be my first visit there, for Rodolphi has found me useful; wherever conspiracies are rife for the good of Mother Church, I am glad to make one." He crossed himself as he spoke with great appearance of devotion.

Catherine imitated his example. "Yes," she replied, "you can aid me much with the malcontents there. Elizabeth has many foes, and Mary Stuart may yet be rescued from her prison. I will give you directions, and shall rely on you: meantime remember,—secrecy and reward!"

As she spoke she left the chamber, and having descended the stairs till she reached the door which communicated with the palace, entered, and closed it, after giving a signal which René heard, who, mounting from the place she had quitted, led the Italian back as he had entered, without any words passing on either side while they remained in the tower.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MILL.

"In legendary lore
The ling'ring hours beguiled."—GOLDSMITH.

THE intelligence which Claude and his companions brought of the project which the enemy had conceived of destroying their fountains, caused much anxiety, and the idea of their being poisoned created such alarm that the magistrates commanded the three public fountains should be guarded to prevent the inhabitants from using the water till it was discovered whether any danger arose from doing so. At the little village of La Font was the source of

this precious supply, and there Birón directed his men to repair, who set about cutting the pipes and destroying the cisterns which conducted the waters to the town; they added to this destruction an attempt to impregnate the source with poison, and remained highly satisfied with the idea that the loss of so important a supply would extremely distress the besieged. While they were busied, however, in this occupation, to their surprise they found themselves set upon by a powerful body, led by Le Normand, and after a violent struggle the village of La Font was abandoned by the Catholic party, who were content in having accomplished their object. In this, however, they had entirely failed, for the three beautiful jets in the town threw up their columns as high as ever and glittered as purely in the sun; for though the pipes which led immediately from the source were cut, other inexhaustible wells and numerous little streamlets poured into the tunnels beyond with greater force; no damage whatever was done, and the townspeople found that their temporary terror might cease at once. This was a delightful discovery, for it gave them assurance that the town would never be taken in consequence of drought.

Letters soon after arrived from the Captain Virolet, who had been taken prisoner in the late skirmish, entreating that his ransom might be paid, and that he might return to the town: here, however, the intelligence of Claude was of use, as he disclosed the treachery of this man, who, it seems, had long acted the part of a spy together with Tibeaudière, giving information to the opposite party from time to time, and receiving their gold in return. This knowledge induced still greater caution on the part of the Rochellois, and they held themselves prepared for attack on every side.

Hunting parties were constantly made from the camp, in order to deceive the besieged and draw them into an ambuscade, but in vain; almost every day La Nouë, with the other nobles, made a sortie, and drove the enemy from the houses and strong places where they hoped to entrench themselves; all parley was rejected, as the frequent approach and easy admission of heralds and messengers

they considered extremely dangerous where treachery had been once discovered.

The Protestant ladies showed themselves no less benevolent than their predecessors, the Black Nuns, had been in the hospital of St. Marguerite; for there was not a female in the town, who did not readily give time, money, and attendance to the wounded soldiers who filled its walls. Alix now found with pleasure that it was in her power to repay the hospitality of the Rochellois, by devoting herself to this service under the guidance of her pretty cousin Lesselline, who had become quite an expert nurse since the commencement of the siege. Every day, too, banquets were prepared in every house for the officers and commanders, and provisions of all sorts ready for the soldiers who defended the town; one feeling alone prevailed —that of determined resistance, and all felt that they were individually called upon to contribute their part towards the general support and encouragement. Each man was required in his turn to carry building materials to the ramparts in the town, but far from murmuring at the severity of their duty the utmost alacrity and willingness were shown: even women and children entreated to be employed as watchers, and they were found in many instances to be of essential service. As the siege went on the ladies of the highest distinction begged to be permitted to take their share in any duty for which they might be considered capable, and one of the most intrepid amongst them was Lesselline, the daughter of De Hommet, who, a delicate, lively girl of not more than seventeen, sprang at once into a heroine on beholding the necessity of exertion. The post assigned to this intrepid and interesting young warrior was that of keeping watch at the highest part of the huge Tour de Moreilles, which on one side overlooked the immense extent of salt-marshes beneath, and on the other commanded a view of the sea, which beat against its base with hoarse murmurs, and at high water filled the fossés that surrounded it. Day after day during the hours which they could steal from attendance on the sick, Lesselline and her scarcely less heroic cousin Alix took their station on the tower, hoping to behold the promised vessels

spreading their white sails afar, and directing their course towards the harbour; but day after day they could only descry the ships of the enemy hovering near, and keeping at a distance every friendly bark that endeavoured to approach.

The high, large, and strong tower of St. Nicholas was well provided with every description of defence for those families who desired to make it their retreat. The smaller tower of La Chaine, close beside, was equally well defended: it derived its name from the circumstance of supporting the great chain which was, when necessary, thrown from its walls to the other tower, guarding the entrance of the harbour. This was a position of importance, as on these towers depended much of the strength of the town; and to a Captain of approved courage and prudence the command was always entrusted, a new one being appointed every year. From this Tour de la Chaine, the city walls, high and strong, extended all along the grève to another remarkable tower, called De la Lanterne, where, at night, burnt continually a massive torch of wax to guide the distant mariner, and warn him against the dangerous sands and rocks of the rugged coast. From thence the walls ran onwards above the elevated embankment, made to form a barrier against the fury of the tide in that part, till the Porte des Moulins was gained, which was also carefully guarded and fortified. Before this Porte a boulevard had been erected by Anthony of Navarre, of exceeding strength; its ravelins, casemates, and fossés so well constructed by the famous engineer Scipio, that it was deemed impregnable. Several old towers, placed at a distance without the walls, defended all the courtines. The next boulevard was called Des Dames, and had been raised to its present height by the indefatigable labour of the ladies and all the townswomen of La Rochelle, at the time of its former siege; for every one took their turn *de porter la hotte* as it was called; that is, to carry the mortar and building materials requisite in its construction, and so perseveringly pursued their arduous task, that, to their eternal honour, it was soon finished.

The largest of all the boulevards was that of L'Evan-

gile, rendered as strong as art could make it, and looked upon as one of the most important points in this well-defended town.

There was no want of ramparts or platforms within the town, whether to sustain pieces of artillery or to support the weaker parts of the walls, in case of their being attacked. In those places of inferior strength, and where the thickness was least, large and deep trenches were made, sustained by strong parapets, from behind which the arquebusiers could not fail to reach those who ventured to approach this part.

The ditches of the town were deep and broad, and the parapets and battlements admirably constructed. The ancient ruined Temple called De Coigne, without the walls, commanded an extensive view over the wide marshes which were untenable for cannon or encampment of any kind; thus it will be seen that La Rochelle presented a formidable appearance to its besiegers; and all who had approached it with unfriendly views learned to hold it in awe.

Near the Porte de Coigne were several mills, some of which the enemy had burnt, and the Rochellois feared that the same fate would attend those that remained; in particular, they were uneasy respecting the mill of La Brande, which was but three hundred yards from the counterscarp. Captain le Normand had requested to have this mill, which he at first proposed to fortify; but finding it would be impossible to keep it, he resolved to gain some profit by it, and accordingly sent the millers every day to grind their corn, who returned each night back to the town. For the security of that which was left in the mill, he appointed one man only as a guard. Mathurin Lussaut, anxious to distinguish himself and full of courage and zeal in the cause, was delighted to find that it had fallen to his lot, one night, to protect the mill, and he accordingly took his post there, anticipating no particular danger. He had provided himself with a light, had made a good fire, and taken to amuse himself, during the long hours of the night, an old book of legends, lent him by a friend in the town. All was quiet; the enemy seemed to

have forgotten that part of the country, and the hollow sighing of the wind along the sails of the mill, alone broke the stillness of midnight. He thought of his pretty Clarice, of whom he was so fond and proud. He rejoiced that she was safe with her aunt; but he could not repress his regrets at the absence which might be so long protracted. Occasionally the scenes of the massacre came before his mind's eye, and he shuddered at the dangers they had escaped: the gallant Montgomery saved by his means, next rose to his memory, and he reflected with pleasure on his preservation.

Every now and then he listened with anxiety for distant sounds, — but nothing came; and, at length, he trimmed his lamp and opened his book. It was a collection of tales of superstition, always believed in Brittany, and listened to with eager interest. He turned over the leaves, and at last hit upon one which interested him.

"In the old mill of Pouldu, not far from the point of rock which seems to cleave the roaring waves at its feet, lived the miller Trevihan, who was more than a hundred years old, and had lived in that mill as long as any man could remember. He had witnessed as many shipwrecks as there are nights in the year; he had seen as many steeples stricken with lightning as there are weeks; and no one could say how may times he had beheld the *Doll-men* with dancing dwarfs circling round its huge stones. He had visited the *Tourigans* in their caves, and he knew all things past and to come.

"He was dwarfish in stature, and his large *bragaw-bras**, like great flour-sacks, seemed to bury him in their fold. His long thin legs were finished by huge long feet. His big head rested on his breast, which was prominent and pointed; his mouth was wide and grinning, and his two eyes unlike each other. When he sat at night in his mill, smoking his short pipe, he looked like a fiend risen up amidst the darkness; yet this frightful monster dared to love one of the prettiest girls in the parish. Her name was Francique, and she was betrothed to the young sailor, Kerias, who had been out for several weeks at sea; and

* Culottes.

during his absence her father, who was very avaricious, lent an ear to the proposals of the dwarf.

"'But Trevihan is old and hideous,' said the pretty maiden, 'and Kerias is so handsome and young; besides, I gave him my promise, and I will wed none but him.'

"When Trevihan heard this, he said to himself, 'It is true I look aged, but I have the power to renew my youth; and why should I not again have recourse to the Tourigan, who will aid me?'

"Accordingly he went into the pine-wood of Kerisonet, and there, in the midst of the trees, by the side of a little fountain, he saw the fairy combing her hair.

"'What would you with me?' said she. 'Fifty years ago, and ten before that, you came to me for youth; if I grant it you again, you must give me up your bride to nurse my little changeling, as you have done all your brides before.'

"'She shall be yours a year and a day after I have married her,' said the miller. He drew his knife, and spilled three drops of his blood into the fountain; a cloud rose out of it, and covered him all round; when it cleared away there stood in his place a handsome young mariner, gay and sprightly, who took his way back to the village, and stopped at the gate of Francique.

"'Open, open, Francique,' said he; 'I am Kerias, come back from sea to claim your promise.'

"Very happy was the pretty maiden when she saw her lover, and she welcomed him with embraces; but she bade him hasten away, for her father had forbidden her to hold discourse with him, as she was to marry the dwarf of the mill of Pouldu.

"'Fear not,' said her lover, 'he is no longer here to trouble you; no one has seen him at his mill, and it is said he has fallen over the cliff into the sea. I am rich now, and your father will not refuse me your hand.'

"The father of Francique loved gold, and, as Kerias had plenty, and the dwarf appeared no more, he gave his consent, and the wedding-day was fixed by Francique. But Francique was always unhappy: she did not feel her first love for Kerias, she shuddered when he came near her,

and always wished him away, and at last she could endure her feelings no longer, and resolved to make a pilgrimage to the chapel of Ste. Ninoc'h, on the borders of the wood of Kerisonet. She got up one morning by day-break, and pursued her way; she had not gone far when a little white fawn suddenly started out of a brake, and began to play round her; she was much alarmed, and walked on, saying her paternoster all the way; for she knew, whoever sees the white fawn of Ste. Ninoc'h will lose her husband on the day of her marriage. The fawn kept gamboling before her, and she thought the whole time of all she had heard of that mysterious animal. A thousand years ago this fawn was pursued by hunters, and took refuge in the oratory of Ste. Ninoc'h, whose hermitage was in this wood. Ever since then the fawn haunted these glades, and though constantly hunted and attacked it remained unhurt. When she got to the chapel it vanished, and there she said her prayers devoutly, and laid her distaff and flax on the altar with pious care. After some time she left the place to return home, her heart much lightened, and as she reached the edge of the wood she met Kerias coming to meet her, and to her surprise felt towards him the same affection as ever. She told him she had now no regrets, and would no longer delay naming the wedding-day. Kerias smiled, and replied that he had that morning only returned from sea, and was rejoiced to find such happiness awaited him: 'I am,' he said, 'as poor as ever; and will your father consent?'

"'What can you mean?' replied the maiden; 'is not everything ready, and my consent alone wanting, not my father's, for that he has given; as for being poor, that is a joke, as we know, and he thinks it a very good one; for myself, it is you I love, not your gold; and to-morrow I will be your wife.'

"Everything was ready next morning; the bride-maids, and men with their flowers and ribbons; plenty of *crépes* on the board, and the *basvalan** full of merriment. She was taken to church by her father and her friends, but as she alighted from her little white horse at the door, to the

* Negotiator of weddings.

surprise of all two trains approached from opposite roads, and preceding them appeared two young men in sailors' dress, both so like each other, that it was impossible to pronounce which was or was not Kerias. The bride shrieked with astonishment, but ran immediately to one whom her heart told her was the true, but her father insisted on the other being the real bridegroom, and a great contention ensued. While this was going on the priest came forward, and bade them all enter the church, which they did.

"'Now,' said he, 'I will marry this maiden to both these men, in the name of the blessed Ste. Ninoc'h, who will reveal which is the true one; till to-night let every one watch in the churchyard; the bride and the two bridegrooms shall remain close to the altar with me, and Heaven will provide for the rest.'

"All was done as the priest had commanded, and they remained in prayer during the rest of that day. At the close of evening the churchyard gate suddenly opened next the wood, and in the sight of all a little white fawn came trotting up to the church-porch. As soon as one of the bridegrooms saw this he became agitated, and uttered strange sounds; his garments began to rustle, and his body to swell: suddenly he burst forth with a long loud howl; his clothes disappeared, and a hideous wolf darted out of the church in pursuit of the white fawn, which bounded off into the wood.

"The true Kerias and his beloved remained thunderstruck, and falling on their knees at the altar, thanked the blessed saint for their deliverance. The dwarf of the mill was never seen again alive, but his spirit may be sometimes beheld hovering amongst the ruins of the mill of Pouldu, sometimes in the shape of an aged and deformed man, sometimes as a Loup-garou, when he utters such hideous and appalling howls that the old mill trembles, and——"

The book fell from the hand of Lussaut; he started up and grasped his arquebuse, for a loud peal of artillery burst upon his ear, fearful as the baying of the fiendish wolf itself. He rushed to the small window, and beheld a sight sufficient to amaze a solitary man alone in a solitary abode, which he was to defend single-handed.

By the light of the moon, which struggling through stormy clouds occasionally threw gleams over the surrounding country, Lussaut saw that a company of infantry had surrounded the mill, planted two culverins, which were pointed towards the devoted spot, and had already begun their fatal discharge. He placed his arquebuse against the small opening, out of which he gazed, and fired; but he felt that to contend against this force was impossible.

"They shall have as much trouble as I can give them," said he, "at any rate; and as they will not imagine that I am alone, I will amuse them with a little manœuvring."

Captain le Normand was somewhat surprised when he was roused at midnight by the report of artillery so near the ramparts, and found, with great vexation, that the mill was so surrounded that it was impossible to reach the unfortunate sentinel. He rushed to the walls, and called loudly, as if there had been a party in the mill, — "Courage, soldiers! yield not! You shall soon have relief!"—at the same time firing upon those without.

Mathurin heard his voice amidst the din; but he saw the promise could not avail him. He shouted the names of several soldiers, and made as violent a noise as possible, hoping to deceive the besiegers into a belief that he had companions. Sixteen times the culverins poured their fire against his retreat; and the walls began, though very strong, to show symptoms of giving way. Finding this, he advanced towards the little window, and demanded a parley. "We will give up the mill," shouted he, "if we are promised our lives, and liberty to return to the town without injury?"

"Your lives are granted," was the reply; "but we shall retain you prisoners."

"Then, do your worst!" exclaimed Lussaut, who had reloaded, and now sent his last ball amongst them: "we will not surrender on less terms."

"Obstinate fools!" cried those without. "Your rickety old mill will not protect you long; but we will not be too hard: come down and open your doors, and you may return to your vixen of a town, and welcome.

We shall soon batter down the walls, and have you all at our mercy."

Mathurin was not sorry to hear this, as his last defence was gone. He therefore descended the ladder, and began to remove the bolts and bars of his fortress. Having done so, he issued forth, much to the surprise of the assailants, *alone!*

"Where are your comrades?" was the immediate question.

"I am governor and garrison, captain and company, all in my own person," replied Lussaut: "My castle is now at your disposal; and much good may it do you."

"What means the insolent churl?" exclaimed the foremost of the band. "Does he mean to say he has kept us loitering here so long, striving against one man? Let him be hung up to the next tree, to teach the rebels manners."

La Mole, who was the speaker, waved his hand for Lussaut to be carried off; and he was instantly seized by several, who were dragging him away, when the Duke of Anjou, who had just come up, cried out: "No; he is a brave fellow, and has done his duty. Let his life be spared."

The soldiers began to murmur and mutter amongst themselves, that Anjou was always ready to show favour to the enemies of the King. The Duke rode off, and heard not their sullen remarks, and Lussaut was left in their hands.

"We will have the Huguenot traitor sent to the galleys: it is a better fate than he deserves," said Coconnas, who was next in command. "Let him be shaved, and put the condemned dress on him; and with the next batch we will send him off to exercise his ingenuity at the oar."

This cruel sentence seemed to give universal satisfaction; and the unfortunate Mathurin was dragged away to the camp, and confined in a ruined shed, which had been appropriated to the reception of prisoners. He was forced immediately to undergo the operation ordered by the Count; and his fine fair locks, the pride of his pretty Clarice, were shorn without mercy.

CHAPTER XV.

A SURPRISE.

"What hallooing, and what stir is this to-day?"
Two Gentlemen of Verona.

The siege of La Rochelle had been undertaken with more impetuosity than prudence. The King of Poland looked forward daily to a summons to repair to his new kingdom; and, though he resolved to delay that event as long as possible, yet he was desirous of leaving behind him a great name amongst the French, and adding to his former achievements that of the reduction of this obstinate town, the importance of which was great. He imagined that all Europe would ring with his praises, if he obtained this victory; that Poland would hail him as a hero, and France long for him as her monarch. He therefore urged the attack, having vowed to reduce the town before the ambassadors from Poland arrived.

La Mole had satisfied him that the lady in his suite had departed, though he did not explain under what circumstances. He hoped to recover Alix by means of the scouts he had sent out; and proposed on her return to conceal her more effectually. His mortification was extreme on finding that his party had been unable to take the fugitive; and the absence of Claude astonished and annoyed him.

Claude and Belcastel meanwhile were joyfully received by the Rochellois as volunteers, together with their band of friends, all of whom were enthusiastic in the cause. Posts were assigned them, and, as every day gave opportunity of performing some act of service, they speedily became distinguished, and were familiarly called *Les braves Clercs*. They were placed under the command of Captain le Normand, who was pleased to have gained so efficient a support; and their zeal and readiness soon made them acquainted with all the duties of their position. Whenever a bold sortie was proposed some of the Braves

Clercs were chosen as a part, and on every occasion their quickness, presence of mind, and hardihood caused success to attend the enterprise. It was on one of these skirmishes that an event occurred which greatly raised Claude in the estimation of his companions, and gave an important prisoner to the besieged.

The besiegers had during the night approached very near the town, to a vineyard called Treuil-Mesnard, where they placed their gabions, and brought their cannon opposite the bastion de l'Evangile. They had greatly extended a trench, which reached along a meadow almost to the foot of the bastion itself. La Mole, who, fop as he was, was yet a good officer, and not wanting in courage, had the command of the party engaged in this service; and at midnight, highly satisfied with what they had accomplished, he, and some choice companions, resolved to repay themselves for their toil by dining as well as the excellent cooks in the suite of the refined epicure could make them.

The place of their retreat was at a mansion which had fallen into their power, called La Columbier, and there they had caused everything to be arranged with the greatest care.

"Gentlemen," said La Mole, as they sat down to table, "it is true that one might dine better in Paris, under the auspices of Samson, More, or Innocent, those high-priests of luxury, or that the inimitable Havart* might provide us dishes far superior to any which the distressing state of things in this nook of earth can allow; but my people are zealous, and their goodwill is great; let us, therefore, endeavour to endure our hardships with becoming resignation. We have, alas! but five services, — but I earnestly believe that the salmi-de-Gondi will be found perfect, the ragout and hâchis passable; — the pastry has, I trust, not suffered by the agitation of my excellent Zamet, whose nerves are a little disturbed by the firing of this cursed Huguenoterie, who ought to have a little consideration for noblemen's habits."

* Famous restaurateurs of the time; thus described in a memorial on the excessive dearness of things in Paris, — "ministres de volupté et de profusion, qui, dans un royaume bien policé, seroient bannis et chassés comme corrupteurs des mœurs."

"Poor wretches!" said Count Coconnas; "I suspect their own cookery is of a somewhat different quality; it is the most comic thing imaginable to hear Virolet's description of what the canaille suffer in Sancerre; they have become so expert in cooking hides that no ragout of Innocent's can, they say, compare with it. They are wondrously ingenious in making a fine *plat* out of their horses' hoofs, and have succeeded so well in concocting a mess of horn that it is become a fashion now to dine on the leaves of their parchment books."

"The brutes!" said La Mole; "they would without remorse devour the best works of our poets, doubtless, to gratify their disgusting appetites. I am told that they go about in the streets raking the dunghills for bones, which they grind for bread. It deprives one of appetite to think of it."

"But what is peculiarly mortifying," said the Chevalier d'Angoulême, "is, that this very morning five fine deer, frightened by the tremenduous screeching of Frezaie, whose notes are truly inimitable, ran out of their woods, and rushed with headlong impetuosity through the camp, before one of our idiots had time to send shots after them; they kept their course even to the very walls, where they were all killed by the besieged, who are doubtless now satisfying their plebeian hunger on those noble animals!"

"This is positively a crime!" returned La Mole; "may the horns choke them! and may they have no soup but that they make by grinding bones till the siege is ended!"

"When are we to be emancipated from this slavery?" lisped Maugiron; "why have we not battered down their walls at once? I cannot understand the silly delay; are laws to be given us by a set of peasants like these! I would I had the command for one day; the weather is getting stormy and unpleasant, and we must positively exert a little spirit, and obtain housing before long. I am told there are some pretty damsels among the psalm-singing population, and it would be a mercy to practise a little love-making, for we shall appear quite awkward on our return to Paris, after living in this state of barbarism."

"*On ne prend pas des pareils chats sans mitaine*," said D'O; "for which reason Birón's great cannon, with its double mouth, has been christened Mitaine, and of course has only to play upon their paper walls an hour, and the town is ours. I blame this idleness as much as you, and after our dinner, if it please you, I propose a little diversion to the casemate yonder, which is kept but by a few men. We can in the darkness easily surprise them, and it will be a work of some utility, and teach our elders a little promptitude and boldness."

"Excellent!" exclaimed most of the party; "we will but drink a bumper to the health of *les dames de nos pensées* and straight about it. How the idiots will gape in the morning to see their fine works destroyed! We will employ ourselves in these little skirmishes every evening for exercise."

"But, La Mole," asked Maugiron, "what have you done with the fair recluse, who was so carefully guarded that we none of us could get a glimpse of the tip of her finger? — The Polish monarch was bitterly enraged when he heard of your treasure, for even he had obeyed orders, and left La Chateauneuf to tears."

"Some devil has carried her off, I verily believe," said La Mole; "it was Virolet's untimely arrival that caused me to lose her; but how she was spirited away I have no conception. Poor girl! she adored me; and it was the tenderness of my heart which could not endure her entreaties to accompany me, her reproaches at my quitting her, that induced me to comply with her wishes, and bring her here."

"Is she handsome, La Mole?" inquired several.

"Too pale, in my mind," said Coconnas.

"Exquisite," replied La Mole; "but it is not her beauty which attaches me—it is her devotion to me: she has left her father, Bailly the President of Accounts, and a splendid match, to fly to my arms. 'Beloved Boniface!' said she, as she threw herself at my feet; 'forgive my passion, and let not your delicacy be shocked at the step I have taken; I am yours alone,—yours for ever.'"

"You are a fortunate man!" sighed D'O. "Would

that we could all have just such a surprise at this moment!"

As he spoke, a shot whistled above his head; before they could scarcely rise from table it was followed by several others, and they found themselves surrounded by armed men. Drawing their swords, and overturning their seats and tables to form a rampart, the officers defended themselves manfully against their assailants; but great was the mortification of La Mole to find that the party was led by no other than Claude, who, springing towards him, with a sudden stroke wrested the sword from his hand, and he found himself at his mercy.

"Retract what you have said, villain!" exclaimed Claude. "Tell your companions that you stole away a lady, on whom you are unworthy to look; and add, that she fled from you and has taken refuge with her friends in La Rochelle. Yield yourself my prisoner or die!"

"Base groom!" cried La Mole, "unhand me. I will not surrender to such as you! Bring me your Captain, and I will acknowledge myself vanquished."

"You shall yield to me only, as some recompense for the unhappiness you have caused me," said Claude, as he possessed himself of his sword, and gave him in charge to several of his companions, while he pursued the advantage they had gained; and after making other prisoners, and having entirely routed the party, leaving some wounded on the spot, the brave Clercs and their captives returned merrily home to La Rochelle.

The news of the capture of La Mole was received in the town with great satisfaction, and with infinite annoyance to the Catholic party. Young D'O was severely wounded, and Maugiron feared that the injury done to his ankle would prevent him from showing off in a galliard for some time.

Anxious to revenge this injury, and furious at the success of this little band, the King of Poland resolved next day to open a fire upon the town. He had again possessed himself of the village of La Font, and no less than thirty-two battering pieces were assembled at that place. Those of the town were, however, not idle; and being

aware of the intention of the enemy, were ready to attack them where they considered themselves most secure. The mêlée was furious, and lasted no less than six hours. La Nouë had, for the second time, his horse killed under him, when Claude and les Braves Clercs at that moment rushed towards him. The Duke d'Aumale was advancing with great impetuosity, mounted, and pointing his arquebuse at the head of Bras de Fer, when a shot from the piece of Claude broke his arm, and saved La Nouë's life. The Duke's horse, which was wounded, plunged and threw him, and a soldier of the Huguenot party ran his sword through his body. Great was the slaughter which ensued; more than a hundred and fifty of the enemy were slain, and several on the side of the besieged, besides twenty wounded, who were carefully conveyed into the town after the battle was over. The loss of the Duke d'Aumale, and so many others, struck dismay into the hearts of the besiegers. A cessation of hostilities was agreed on for several days, during which no works were to go on, and breathing time was allowed; not with a view on the part of the King of Poland to accommodation, but to enable him to recommence the attack with greater fury.

Sad were the reflections of poor Lussaut when he found himself a prisoner, with the loss of his cherished curls, and habited in the coarse dress of a felon.

"This is hard," said he, in a desponding mood, "after such a capital resistance as I made, and having taken in those *goujats de massacreurs*, to be sent to the galleys, like a criminal, instead of getting a step in my company. Poor little Clarice! this will be sad news for her. I can't even send her a lock of my hair as a remembrance. Is there no way to get out of this place? It does not seem over strong; and if I escaped the mêlée in Paris, I don't see that it should be impossible here."

He looked round the chamber in which he had been thrust, and examined every part; but there seemed little chance of escape. Several hours passed; and at length a soldier entered with his prison fare, — a handful of chestnuts, a piece of black bread, and some water.

"Is this the way the King treats his subjects?" said

Mathurin; "and is this the good faith we are to expect at the hands of his officers? I was promised free way back to La Rochelle, if I gave up my fortress; and now I am treated like a felon."

"It's no affair of mine," said the soldier; "you should not reproach me; it's the fate of war."

"No such thing," replied Lussaut; "your Captain ought to be ashamed to call himself a soldier, and forfeit his word. Is this black bread all I am to have?"

"And good enough, too!" surlily cried the soldier, "for a Huguenot."

"I am no Huguenot," returned Mathurin. "The forty martyrs forbid! but as good a Catholic as any in Biròn's army: but if to prove one's faith one must cut the throats of one's neighbours without remorse, and in cold blood, I'd rather be a Turk or a Jew, than such a Christian."

"Why," said the soldier, with a stupid stare, "I thought all the other side were Huguenots. What did you do in that mill?"

A sudden thought flashed on the mind of Mathurin.

"This seems a stupid fellow," said he to himself: "what if I could persuade him that I was ready to betray the town? it might lead to good. As for that," he added, answering his jailor, "one's obliged to obey orders. I'd rather take arms on this side, if I could; but I was pressed into the service, and couldn't help myself. I know a few things which Biròn wouldn't be sorry if he knew as well—ay, and I'd tell them, too, if I got paid for it."

"Oh, you would?" said a voice behind, which Mathurin recognised as that of Captain Virolet. "Leave me alone with this fellow," he added to the soldier, "and I will question him."

The soldier retired, and Lussaut remained alone with the Captain, who had so lately deserted from the Huguenot party.

"Are you willing," said the traitor, "to assist in an enterprise to enter the town by stratagem? if so, you are safe from the galleys, and shall be well rewarded; but

remember, if you are not true, I have men within the walls who can revenge any attempt at deception."

"I am a poor man," replied Mathurin, "and must get my bread. I serve whoever pays best, and I hope there's no harm in that; they are poor enough in La Rochelle, and a man gets only hard blows for his pains. I am tired of such work, and if a good round sum were offered me, I don't think I should stand bargaining."

"Then come with me to the General," said Virolet, "and he will talk to you about it."

So saying, he led the way, and Mathurin followed, passing several soldiers and sentinels, till he reached the tent of the General Duc de Biròn, whom he found surrounded by his staff. Virolet, leaving him at the entrance of the tent, conversed in a low voice with Biròn, after which he was ordered to approach. He was then asked what the general feeling in the town was, and he thought it prudent to represent that the men were, in general, discontented, and ready to lay down their arms, if a good opportunity occurred.

"What troop do you think most likely to be open to bribery?" asked Biròn. Mathurin hesitated a moment, and then replied boldly, "That of Captain le Normand, to which I belong."

Virolet, much to the surprise of the captive, who had spoken against his conviction, rejoined, in a voice loud enough for him to hear, "He speaks truth; there are ten that I know of in that company."

"And," said Mathurin, encouraged by his success, "if I could promise good pay, the regiment of strangers and foreigners would not refuse to listen to a sensible proposal."

"Do you know the Captains de Saux and Puygaillard?" asked Virolet, significantly.

"Truly," replied Mathurin, who cared not if he accused the whole garrison by implication, "they would not be the men to stand in the way of a soldier turning an honest penny."

After a great many questions and much consultation, Mathurin was ordered back to his prison, with a prospect

of being called upon the next day to arrange further what should be done, and whether he should be employed. His being a Catholic and a stranger was considered in his favour, and, as the object of the adverse party was, if possible, to surprise the town, which they began to fear would prove stronger than they anticipated, they came to the conclusion that Lussaut should be trusted.

It was agreed that he should escape, and, on entering the town, repair to Captain de Saux, and inform him of the intention of the enemy to approach, under cover of the night, a breach which had been made in the walls, near the Porte des Deux Moulins, and to conceal themselves in a trench beneath, where a mound of ruins would facilitate their entrance, provided they were assisted from within. A list of those who were ready to lend their aid in the betrayal of the town was given to Lussaut, and he was to consult with any of the commanders to whom he could most readily obtain access. This plan settled he was permitted to leave his uncomfortable abode, and, accordingly, after having been detained only a few days, in the dusk of the evening he bent his steps to La Rochelle; as he approached the walls he began to run, and, to favour the deception, several soldiers appeared in pursuit, who sent shots after the fugitive. He was soon seen and recognised, in spite of his costume, and the gate was opened to admit him. Without losing an instant, he hurried to the quarters of Belcastel, and there related his adventures and entreated to be conducted to the mayor, to whom he would communicate all he had been able to learn of the treachery which lurked amongst them.

Great was the mortification and alarm of the Rochellois leaders, when they discovered how extensive was the treason which the prudence of Mathurin had brought to light. Three captains and no less than twenty men were implicated, and in the company of the brave Le Normand most of them had concealed themselves. All these were arrested, and, some of them having confessed, it was found that the watchword by which they were to be known was "*Badin*," and the sign, making a crook of the little finger and catching the tip of the ear with it.

The hour and the place being indicated by Lussaut, it was directed that Captain le Normand, with an approved band, amongst whom were Claude, Belcastel, and their party, should post themselves behind the wall opposite the breach, and there be ready to receive the besiegers. The night was very dark, and the rain descended at intervals with violence; the watchers were, however, sheltered by the works, as they listened eagerly for the sound of the approaching enemy. Presently some of the rubbish beneath was thrown against the wall, and Lussaut, stepping forward to the breach, stooped down and gave the word "Badin."

"Have you ladders," said he, "and how many are you? All is prepared; — several hundred have joined us."

As he spoke, two ladders were placed, and the first who mounted was Captain Virolet. "We are a strong body," said he. "Where is De Saux?"

"Close by," said Mathurin, "but he has his reasons for not coming forwards; step this way and he will join you; — give me your hand, — there, put your foot on that stone — all's safe!"

"Is Guittinière Picque-ardoise ready?" asked Virolet.

"Yes," replied Mathurin; "your men have only to mount, as silently as possible, or the sentinel, whom we must surprise, will hear."

"I will give the word, then," said Virolet; and, as it was whispered to those in the trench the soldiers began to mount in single file. Virolet had advanced, as directed by Lussaut, towards the opposite wall, where he expected to meet De Saux, when he was seized and gagged in a moment, and at the same time a volley of artillery welcomed the scaling party. A fearful struggle then took place; the whole town was instantly on the alert, lights appeared in every direction, and everything told the besiegers that they were betrayed. Most of those who had mounted the ladders were killed, and, the gates being thrown open, Le Normand, and les Braves Clercs made a furious sortie, in which they fell upon the troops who were advancing to the attack, and routed them with great

slaughter, after which, they returned to their town, and the discomfited Catholics in much confusion made the best of their way back to the camp.

Virolet was carried prisoner to the château, and a speedy example was made, both of him and his treacherous companions within the town: — they suffered public execution; amidst the execrations of their fellow-citizens, and their remains were thrown from the walls to be devoured by the birds of prey and wild animals whom the frequent combats had attracted towards the plain beneath.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AMBASSADOR.

"Wit me warns to shun such snares as threaten mine annoy."
Queen Elizabeth's Verses.

It now becomes necessary that the reader should allow the scene to be changed for awhile to England for the better understanding of this narrative. The inhabitants of the town of Dover were one morning roused from their slumbers by the sound of guns at sea, which were answered by a royal salute from the batteries on the heights. Every individual rose with common consent, and rushed to the shore, half expecting to behold the landing of an enemy. But it was soon apparent that several French ships were entering the harbour, bearing the royal flag, and coming in all amity on a special mission. One by one, amidst the repeated greetings of the cannon above, the vessels approached, and preparations were made for the landing of their illustrious passengers. These were Gondi, Duke de Retz, Ambassador Extraordinary from the French Court to Queen Elizabeth, and his suite. As soon as it was known who the visitors were, a general feeling of discontent prevailed amongst the people, which seemed to increase when the name of Catherine's chief favourite and counsellor was proclaimed on every side.

"What brings the Italian adventurer amongst us?"

said a bystander; "we will have no Romish marriages here; no cutting throats in the dark, no murdering by wholesale."

This unfriendly feeling was not a little increased when the cargo of the vessel, from which the Ambassador disembarked, was landed. As if he had arrived on a savage coast, Gondi, with insolent affectation, had caused every variety of accommodation, that could be imagined, to be brought for his use. Not only cooking utensils, even to the commonest article, but chests and packets of provisions, and hampers of wine without end, linen, tapestry, and furniture. The English saw the upstart favourite and his train pass along between two ranks of guards, which had been sent by the Queen to do him honour, without expressing any feeling but that indicated by contemptuous silence: but when they saw all this preparation, and learned the contents of the enormous packages which filled several waggons, their indignation at the impertinence of the minion of Catherine burst out in invectives, and the train of carts and carriages was followed by hooting and hissing.

"It were well if the assassin have brought no poisons with him," said one.

"It is the only thing fit for his use which the insolent craven will not find in England," said another; "though it is better he should provide himself with viands, for ours are too good to be swallowed by any of these massacring villains."

"He loves blood better than good English malt," observed a third. "It would be a good deed to pelt him and his ragamuffins through the streets."

The murmuring crowd was, however, kept back by the men-at-arms, who conducted Gondi, somewhat alarmed at his reception by the people, to a mansion which had been set apart for him. Here he and Bianco, who accompanied him as his chief officer, consulted together on the subject. "These savage islanders," said, "show their surly disposition too plainly; I fear there is little chance of propitiating them."

"Gold buys all goodwill," said René, "and that we

need not spare. Flattery with the Queen, and money with her subjects, will gain our end, depend on it."

The surprise of the ambassador was great when he found that directions had been received that he and his suite should be entertained at Dover, as the Queen, who was about to commence her usual progresses, would visit Dover in person, in order to confer with the envoys of Charles IX. This arrangement rather disconcerted the schemes of Gondi and Bianco, as it betrayed a want of confidence in them, and was particularly vexatious, as it rendered their communication with their friends of the Catholic party less direct and convenient.

The Queen herself was anxious to confer with the minister of Charles, but cautious lest she should betray her own interests; she, therefore, while she kept the ambassador and his party aloof, made a merit of hastening to receive them at Dover.

Accordingly when she arrived, the reception they received from her was very flattering, and much art was put in force on both sides to answer the ends each had in view. The request for a loan was evaded by Elizabeth, who had no inclination to assist France at that juncture, although it was not her policy to go to war. As regarded La Rochelle, she promised that no money should be advanced in England for the aid of the besieged.

"Your Majesty has been grievously wronged by those insurgents," said Gondi. "Certain of your Majesty's subjects have given such promises of your protection to them, that their insolence knows no bounds, and they forget in the hope of injuring France the gratitude they owe to you."

"They have received no encouragement from me," replied Elizabeth. "I should be the last to foster rebellion; but I consider that they have been hardly used, in not being permitted the exercise of their religion; and I cannot blame them for refusing to admit into their town those who had received orders to treat them with the same rigour as their brethren in Paris and the other cites of France."

"Alas! Madam," returned Gondi; "I fear your Ma-

jesty has fallen into an error. King Charles loves all his subjects independently of their profession of faith, which he respects, though he cannot conceive the tenets of Calvin calculated to excite the same degree of indulgent admiration from a Catholic as the purer doctrines of Luther, which, I believe, receive your Majesty's sanction."

"True," said Elizabeth, gratified at this artful compliment; "but this is not to the point. The late measure of severity has, I must confess, filled me and my people with horror and displeasure. The murder — forgive me, for I can call it no other — of the Admiral, is difficult to excuse; and why," she continued, her better feelings of indignation predominating, "why include in the fearful vengeance taken, so many innocent persons, men, women, and little children, who could not have offended?"

"The Admiral, Madam," said Gondi calmly and with infinite effrontery, "came to Paris with a pomp and parade, and an army of determined partisans, entirely eclipsing by his bravery the majesty of the King, throwing into contempt his power, and outraging his dignity. Let me in the first place ask, would your Majesty permit this insolence in any of the great lords who surround you?"

"I!" exclaimed Elizabeth, reddening: "who would dare to attempt it? I would not permit, but punish the daring subject who should dream of such boldness."

"Certainly," continued Gondi, meekly; "my King thought the same; but all monarchs have not your Majesty's firmness and wisdom. The King mildly expostulated; represented the bad effect of the Admiral's conduct on the people. I regret to say, his friendliness was met by defiance."

"I would have arrested the traitor instantly!" exclaimed the Queen.

Gondi continued: — "Charles still condescended to entreaty, but Coligni knew his power. Paris was filled with riot and disorder; the friends of the King were contemned and oppressed, and, to crown all, it was discovered that a plot was nearly ripe for execution, in which all the royal family were to be sacrificed, and the Admiral to seize the crown of France. Was this to be endured? Could

patience last longer? The Admiral met his fate, and deservedly.

"With respect to the rigour shown to those of the religion which your Majesty mentions, I am at a loss to understand what it was. Doubtless, the Admiral did not fall alone; many of his followers shared his fate. It has reached me, and much do I deplore it, that one or more men of letters fell by unhappy accident, in the scuffle; but I can safely affirm that neither female nor child suffered. Good God! the very thought harrows my feelings; and much I marvel how such a belief could have gained ground, knowing, as I do, the tenderness of the King's heart, and the efforts he personally made in the affair.

"That the wisest and most learned Princess in Europe should regret the fate of those men of genius whom I have named, does not surprise me. 'Alas!' said the Duke d'Anjou immediately after, 'she who is the Minerva of the age will shed tears when she hears of this; and that beauty will be clouded, which all agree is the most perfect God has made for the last five hundred years!'" *

Here the ambassador was so overcome by his emotion that he paused, while Elizabeth's eye flashed with gratified vanity.

"I am sorry," said she, "that I have so far mistaken this affair, and attributed motives to the King so different to the truth."

"Gracious Madam," resumed Gondi, apparently recovering himself, "prove your conviction of my master's innocence by discouraging his foes. Let me supplicate that the fleet now collected at Plymouth and Falmouth may be dispersed. Why should the Count de Montgomery emulate the conduct of the late Admiral, and embroil by his intemperance two nations, formed to love each other?"

"Hold!" said Elizabeth haughtily; "my subjects are unrestricted by me in their right to traffic. These ships are fitted out at individual expense; I know nothing of their plans, nor do I see fit to interfere. If they abuse the right I grant, for other purposes than commerce, let

* See Digges, for this and other facts equally startling.

the powers whom they offend treat them as pirates, and punish them accordingly. But ask me not to abridge the liberties of Englishmen, which I am proud to see flourish and increase."

She looked proudly round upon her courtiers, from whom a murmur of applause arose. Gondi did not allow the slightest expression to indicate his annoyance, and went on to offer the greetings of the Queen-mother, and name her desire to present tokens of her friendship.

"The Queen has commissioned," he said, "Messire René Bianco to bear to your Majesty a few trifles, which, being rare, she hoped might please your eye for a moment."

"I thank her infinitely," replied the Queen: "the fame of Messire René's taste and talent has already reached me, and I am happy to see him here."

René then advanced, and kneeling, with an expression of profound humility, at her feet, offered several presents of esteemed essences, prepared by his hand, and several pairs of those embroidered and perfumed gloves, which were then so highly esteemed. "I have," he ventured to remark, "in charge from my august Mistress a saddle of curious construction, which has been arranged under my directions; if the most graceful horsewoman in the world would deign to honour it by the trial, I think it would be found one of the best she has ever condescended to use."

"Let it be shown me, pray," said Elizabeth, with pleased impatience. "I thank the Queen heartily for this, for I have some skill in horsemanship, like herself. Does she ride much now?"

"Since the accident, when, her horse stumbling, she received a severe contusion, her Grace," answered René, "has lost that boldness which should characterise a good rider. She was considered the finest manageress of a spirited steed of any princess living, till your Majesty eclipsed all in that accomplishment, as in every other."

"You Frenchmen are all flatterers," said the Queen playfully.

"Nay, Madam," returned René, "were I a savage and an idiot, the sight of such charms as dazzle me at this

moment might create a soul, never before called forth from the earth which envelopes me."

"Gondi," said the vain Queen, "is not Messire Bianco a poet? I recognise, methinks, the secret flame burning beneath the embers of his modesty."

"And a musician," replied De Retz; "if any can be called so in your Majesty's presence."

"René, you must give me a specimen of your art," said Elizabeth: "we will have a chosen few to-night in my cabinet, and tax your powers."

"Alas! Madam," said René, putting on a perturbed appearance, "I shall not dare ——"

"Away!" said Elizabeth, tapping him with her fan, one of the presents which she had just opened, of Catherine: "You are to obey, and I to command."

"Ah!" whispered De Retz, "who would not obey such sweet commands as issue from those lips of ruby? Pardon me, Madam; these are not my own words: there is a devoted Prince who used them in speaking of the lady of his adoration; he who has adopted for his motto words which faintly express his feelings! — Knows the fairest of creation, *what* knight bore at a certain tournament, the motto, 'Serviet æternum, dulcis quem torquet Eliza?'"

Elizabeth blushed. — "You must tell me," she said in a low voice, "more of the Duke d'Anjou privately; here we are observed, and by those inimical, I grieve to say."

The saddle which René had brought was now examined, and commented upon with great satisfaction by the Queen and her ladies. It was covered with exquisite embroidery in small pearls on violet velvet, with borders of gold, and complimentary devices introduced amidst the flowers, formed of coloured gems. It had the pummel of plain velvet, constructed after the model which Catherine de Medicis had herself introduced some years before, in order, as she sat on horseback, to exhibit to advantage the perfect beauty of her foot and ancle, for which, as well as that of her hand and arm, she had been remarkable.

After much more compliment De Retz took his leave, being appointed by Elizabeth to attend her, together with René, in the evening.

Meantime, Captain Florio had not been idle; he had a friend, who after many vicissitudes of a similar nature to those experienced by that remarkable adventurer himself, had become the favourite physician of the Earl of Leicester. This man's name was Giulio; he was a native of Milan, and in cunning and talent was little inferior to René Bianco himself. He had made himself very useful to Leicester, whose ambitious views were constantly leading him into some scheme for his own aggrandizement. At this moment the possibility of his marriage with Elizabeth had received a check in consequence of the Queen's real or assumed willingness to listen to the proposals of the French King's brother; and filled with anger and disappointment, he lent an ear to the propositions of the Catholic party, who held out to him the advantages of assisting their plans for Mary Stuart, who, should she succeed in establishing her right to the crown, by means of her foreign friends, would be a more eligible alliance than Elizabeth herself. It was represented to him, that should Elizabeth consent to marry the Duke of Anjou, the measure would give so much dissatisfaction to her Protestant subjects, that her popularity would be greatly decreased, and their chances rise in proportion. He was wavering between the two opinions at the period of Gondi's arrival; and the good reception given to him, added to the late advancement to the Queen's favour of the accomplished Sir Christopher Hatton, altogether had so roused his jealousy that he vowed to execute some signal vengeance on both her and her favourites.

Giulio, therefore, found him in a proper mood to listen to the schemes of Catherine, communicated by Florio, and he consented to give his aid in advancement of a plan to get the Queen into the power of France, and to release Mary from her confinement.

It was settled that a grand aquatic fête should be prepared on board of a vessel lying in the harbour at Dover; that the most novel and brilliant devices should be prepared, and every means resorted to, to tempt the Queen to accept the invitation, which should be given by Leicester and others, ostensibly in honour of herself and the ambassador

from France; that when the festivities were at the height, and the attention of all engaged, the anchor should be weighed, and the royal prize borne away to the opposite shore, where her detainers might make whatever terms they pleased. *

However daring this proposal might be, Leicester in his anger and mortification looked upon it as a means of gratifying his bad feelings, and almost without allowing himself time for reflection he blindly entered into the plan and immediately busied himself in contriving means to execute it.

Gondi heard with much pleasure of the success of the negotiation of Florio, and repaired with René to the Queen, in the evening of that day, resolved to gain her confidence by every art of which he was master. So well did he succeed, and so fascinated was Elizabeth with the accomplishments of René, that she privately intimated to them that she would willingly consent to the French alliance, and all that was now necessary was to gain the ministers and the people.

"And you, René," said the Queen, "must leave your old mistress for a new one who will cherish you as much; we will make a court of love, learning, and the arts, equal to that of your Princess Marguerite. Ronsard must visit me, and all your Pleiad, and politics and ambition shall be banished from our minds."

Full of these romantic visions, the Queen was in a mood to listen to any proposition of pleasure, and when she was solicited to honour with her presence the fête which the Earl of Leicester had prepared, the novelty of its taking place on board of a vessel pleased her imagination.

"I will be dressed," said she to her ladies, "as the goddess of the sea, and you shall all attend me as nymphs of the watery element. My locks shall flow gracefully over my shoulders, a green mantle embroidered with silver sea-weed shall fall in drapery round me; I will have a wand of coral, and a zone of crystals, and my sandals shall be of yellow satin spangled with gold to represent the sands. Gondi shall take back such an account of my

* See Etoile.

appearance to France that Anjou shall be inflamed with passion, and be unable to rest till he once more beholds me. Depend on it we shall see him here as soon as he is released from the trammels of the siege which now occupies him."

"Does your Majesty mean that of La Rochelle?" asked one of the ladies, "where our poor Protestant brethren are starving within their walls, waiting for promised succours from England?"

"What raven note is this?" said Elizabeth, sharply. "Can I never enjoy an hour's recreation without being checked with reproof, and reminded of misfortune?"

"Your Majesty will need to become accustomed to reproof," said the noble attendant, boldly; "if you throw away your beauty and your love upon a Catholic Prince, who, when he gains power, will not fail to show how small is his friendliness to the poor deceived Protestants in both countries."

"No more of this, madam," said Elizabeth. "I am resolved to enjoy this pastime, and gloomy reflections shall hold no place in my thoughts."

But although she thus expressed herself, an uneasy feeling took possession of her mind, which she tried to shake off in vain, until the time arrived when she was to repair to the vessel which was to afford her a new style of amusement.

Gay and bright was the morning of the intended festivity, and the heights of Dover were crowded to witness the gay spectacle; numerous ships, decorated in the most gorgeous manner, lay at anchor, and one, beyond the rest, was brilliantly adorned, which was to be the scene of the plot. A number of Catholic gentlemen had assembled in barges and boats, and all the guests having been invited by Leicester, he was careful to exclude those whom he conceived to be too quick-sighted. The wayward mood of the Queen, offended at the freedom of remark which those about her hazarded, greatly favoured the plan, for she resolved that no grave statesman or grim politician should be admitted, to disturb the tranquil delight of the fantastic scene which she imagined to herself.

She had already mounted her palfrey, which was adorned with the beautiful saddle of René, whom she allowed to assist her, and to whom she gave numerous smiles, much to the jealous annoyance of her other favourites, who stood aloof. De Retz, splendidly attired, rode beside her, and was followed by a numerous and gorgeous retinue, amongst whom were conspicuous Florio and his select band of foreigners of all nations; Maurevel, who had escaped from Paris after the first attempted assassination of the admiral, had joined his former friend on the coast, and was now one of his party. Bianco walked by the Queen, carefully attending to the adjustment of her robe, and instructing her gallantly how to accustom her delicate and nymph-like foot, as he continued to call it, to the new stirrup, and how to repose her limbs, which he compared to every celestial beauty which his memory furnished, with the greatest ease on the comfortably constructed saddle.

In this fashion they were proceeding amidst the acclamations of the people, astonished and delighted at the quaint attire of their queen, towards the harbour, when a great stir was observed amongst the attendants; they gave way, and left passage for a horseman riding at full speed, who, covered with dust, and flushed with haste and fatigue, dashed, regardless of ceremony, through the crowd of guards and people. Before it was possible to prevent him, he had spurred his horse to the side of the Queen, and, presenting a letter, caught her bridle at the same moment. "Read, madam, read!" was all he could utter, as throwing himself from his horse, he knelt at her feet, and placed his hand upon her robe.

Elizabeth, astonished and confused, took the paper, and ran her eye hastily over its contents, which were these:—

"Gracious lady and mistress,—You are betrayed by Gondi and his myrmidons. The vessel on board of which you venture will weigh anchor the moment you have entered: the plan is, to sail with you prisoner to France. Turn your bridle instantly. Your faithful servant is close at hand to explain all. For the love of God and your

country avoid the snare!—hasten back to Greenwich and save England!

"MONTGOMERY."

A panic instantly took possession of Elizabeth, on whom warnings were seldom thrown away; a thousand doubts, fears, and suspicions flashed on her mind, and her resolution was taken in a moment. "Thanks, good friend," she cried to the horseman at her feet, as she turned her palfrey, so suddenly, as almost to overturn René, who, stumbling against the panting messenger, perceiving that all was discovered, feigned to imagine it was he who so rudely pushed against him, and with a well-directed aim dealt him so violent a blow on the cheek as to throw him on the ground; this action, as he still held her Majesty's robe, gave her so rude a shock, that she started and turned pale. Leicester, seeing what had happened, and that there was now no hope of accomplishing the plan in agitation, hurried forward, and in a loud voice commanded the guards to surround their Queen.

"If there is treason we will seek it out," said he. "Stand back, all but those servants of our adored lady, and let her pass."

But Elizabeth, with a scornful air, waved her hand, recovered her composure instantly, and, spurring her palfrey, galloped back the way she had come, without once stopping, till she reached her temporary abode. But there she would not dismount, and throwing a mantle over her dress, ordered all her baggage, and all her suite to follow immediately, as her destination was to her palace at Greenwich, without delay; after which directions she continued her route, and never drew rein till she reached her good city of Canterbury.

Amidst the astonishment and confusion of this event, Gondi, René, and their party slowly prepared to take their way back to their residence, but the crowd soon got scent of the truth, and rage and indignation took possession of every mind. The messenger, as he rose from the ground, caught a glimpse of the face of his assailant, René, and, close beside him, that of Maurevel.

"Blessed heaven!" cried he, "the murderers of the Admiral close to the Queen!"

The word flew like wild-fire, and loud cries of "The murderers of the Admiral!" "The assassins of Coligni!" "The butchers of St. Bartholomew!" made the air re-echo. Maurevel, in mortal terror, rushed towards the sea-side, pursued and pelted, and, half-dead with terror and bodily injury, was received on board of one of the French boats, which rowed off as fast as possible to their vessels.

René, also hooted and reviled, was rescued with some difficulty from the mob by the soldiers, and Florio and his men, to whom the messenger directed attention, as some of the worst of the assassins of Paris, were obliged to house themselves as quickly as possible. Nothing could exceed the vexation of Gondi; but he thought it prudent to brave the accusations which might be made, and instantly followed the Queen to Greenwich, determined not to allow himself to be foiled, or to leave the character of his Court in so dangerous a position. René deemed it more prudent to return immediately to Paris, and relate what had happened to Catherine, and accordingly embarked directly, and set sail for France that same afternoon, leaving the cunning minister to smooth the difficult path of his diplomacy.

When Queen Elizabeth was once more within her palace walls, she seemed to breathe freely, and began to consider the dangerous position in which she had been placed, and its consequences. In the midst, however, of her alarm and resentment, she did not lose her presence of mind or her prudence, and resolved calmly to investigate every thing. The day after her return, the arrival of the Count de Montgomery was announced to her, and she ordered him to be instantly ushered to her presence. So great was his emotion on beholding her, that he could scarcely restrain his tears, and the Queen herself was sensibly affected on meeting him.

"I have no words, De Lorges," said she, extending her hand graciously, "to express my thanks; but has not your zeal deceived you? Is it possible that such a plot could be really in contemplation? If so, some of my own subjects must be implicated.

"This treacherous plot," said Montgomery, "is from the fruitful mind of Catherine, the Queen-mother. I received information of it from those I can trust; and when I heard who was the ambassador, and who his companions, I felt no doubt of the truth of the statement. Let me entreat you, madam, neither to wear or to use any articles of dress sent you as presents: they have proved fatal to many, and caution in this case is of the utmost importance."

"I shall take heed of this," replied Elizabeth, taking off her embroidered gloves, and throwing them from her; "all that was sent to me from France shall be destroyed instantly,—even to the splendid saddle, which I will use no more."

"I thank your Majesty," said Montgomery. "Nothing but treachery is to be expected from every member of the house of Valois, as long as the arch enemy of our religion, Catherine, reigns supreme. Oh! Madam, let not my prayers be vain, when I supplicate you to espouse the righteous cause, and give your sanction to the efforts its friends are ready to make. The Rochellois are daily in danger of falling victims to delay; massacre and starvation are staring them in the face; and your word might save them!"

"I have given my word not to interfere," said Elizabeth; "and much as I regret it, nothing can be done,—at least openly," she added, pausing.

"Give but your private sanction, gracious Madam," exclaimed De Lorges, eagerly. "I have vessels and money, if I might use them; and it may not be yet too late. If you would but be pleased to consent to the measure, we could at this moment command no less than twenty-two thousand foot and four thousand horse, which the Protestant noblemen and gentry of your Majesty's realm would bring to our aid, and maintain for six months at their own expense."

"Indeed!" said Elizabeth.

"Yes, Madam," returned he; "the Germans would levy money if England would assist us; eighteen thousand

men could be procured in France; and our cause, the cause of religion, would triumph over its inveterate foes."

"The time is not yet come," said Elizabeth; "it is not ripe. You want a leader at present. Henry of Navarre and Condé are still prisoners. Wait till one or both of them escape, and something may be done. I cannot, at this juncture, afford to quarrel with France."

"But La Rochelle will be lost!" cried Montgomery.

"No," returned Elizabeth, "not if you succour it. Go, De Lorges,—give me no details, nor ask me for consent. I can no farther help you; but you have my prayers for your success."

Forced to be satisfied with this concession, Montgomery overwhelmed the Queen with thanks; and, quitting the Court, with as little delay as possible, hastened back to Plymouth, where he lost no time in putting his vessels to sea; and hoped, at length, to be able to afford protection and assistance to the besieged town of La Rochelle.

Elizabeth did not refuse to listen to the artful sophistry of Gondi, who affected the most complete ignorance of the cause of her sudden departure, concluding, he said, that some important affairs had called for her return to her capital.

He excused the absence of René, as well as he might, and contrived by flattery and adroit representation so well to quiet her fears, that she began to suspect either that Montgomery had been deceived in his suspicions, or that he had employed this means of placing her under an obligation, in order to obtain from her the assistance for La Rochelle, for which he had so long striven. Leicester, of course, stoutly denied the truth of the imputation; and Elizabeth was content to appear satisfied with all parties.

Whatever her real belief might be, she was frequently heard to say, when speaking of Gondi, that the King of France had no more faithful and zealous servant than he in his dominions.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EARTHQUAKE.

"Our thunders
Shall rain their drift of bullets on this town." — *King John.*

The Rochellois had seen, with great vexation, the galleys of the enemy bringing along an enormous vessel, and placing it in such a position as almost to command a part of the town. It was of twelve hundred tons, and was called Le Grand Carraque, — merely a hull, its masts and every part of it gone, leaving the deck a platform from whence they were enabled to fire into the town right and left, a circumstance which caused infinite annoyance to the besieged, besides its intercepting the navigation and preventing their receiving supplies by sea. Several attempts had been made to set it on fire at low water, but without avail, as the enemy had taken precautions which effectually prevented such a catastrophe.

Anxiously did the inhabitants of the town, every day pressed nearer and nearer, look for the arrival of the vessels of succour from the English coast, and they beheld with consternation new sails continually appearing, bearing the enemy's flag, and rendering the approach of the fleet of Montgomery, should he be able to obtain assistance, more and more difficult and hazardous.

La Nouë consented at length, with the sanction of the authorities of the town, to hold occasional parleys with the camp, as he began to think accommodation would be better than protracted resistance. There was much opposition, however, to this measure; and finding that, notwithstanding all his recommendations, he could not convince them that it would be their best policy, he resolved to absent himself altogether, and retiring to the camp, use all the influence he possessed to obtain good terms for them.

Scarcely had La Nouë left them when a messenger arrived who had been detained some time, and had reached the town with infinite difficulty: he brought letters from

Montgomery, and the deputies, who had been sent from La Rochelle to England, announced the certainty of succours arriving shortly. New life and fresh courage were inspired by this news, and the Rochellois resolved to prove to La Nouë that they were right in wishing to defend La Rochelle to the last. While they were full of rejoicing and occupying themselves with the utmost energy in preparing new defences, the Catholics, who appeared resolved daily to make some desperate efforts to reduce them, made one of the most furious attacks which had yet been attempted. The affair lasted more than nine hours, and fierce was the conflict. While the besieged were in the midst of the fray, fighting with the most determined valour, Alix and Lesselline, gazing from their high tower, beheld a sight which filled them with anxiety. A small English-built vessel was descried sailing with all speed through the very centre of the Catholic fleet, and though fired at on all sides, came rushing along the waters like a sea-bird, and entered the harbour of La Rochelle amidst the shouts of those who were watching its motions with breathless eagerness.

The bell of the tower was instantly rung with joyful violence by the two delighted friends, and its merry peal announced to the townsmen the happy arrival of part of the expected fleet. It was found that it contained a good supply of powder and corn, and brought news that several others, similarly provided, were on their way.

Night after night had Alix and Lesselline kept watch in the tower, and at length, quite wearied out, they consented to abandon their post and retire to their home, while other ladies, equally devoted, took their place. They could not bear to be separated, and De Hommet, who was constantly engaged in the siege, was happy that his wife and daughter had so great a comfort as the society of Alix afforded. His anxiety for his family grew daily more intense, and he dreaded the slow but sure approach of that scarcity which this long-protracted siege threatened. Claude and Belcastel were in the same troop as himself, and his friendship for the two gallant young men increased with the actions which they were constantly performing.

They were actively employed one night, during a short pause of hostilities, in repairing a terrace in the hospital garden, near De Hommet's house, which the falling in of a mine had destroyed. The enemy, always on the alert, became aware of the work, and resolved, if possible, to put a stop to it: accordingly, they placed their cannon opposite to the Porte Neuve, behind the hospital, and quite unexpectedly commenced a heavy fire. Several men were killed, and the balls were thrown with fearful precision. Suddenly De Hommet uttered a loud exclamation: —

"My children! my poor wife!" said he, "they will be sacrificed! — yonder is my house in flames!"

"Good God!" cried Belcastel; "and to-night all the ladies are within it!"

There was not a moment to lose, the firing still continued, and it was necessary to return it against the besiegers: no one could leave his post, and the destruction of the family of De Hommet seemed inevitable.

"Claude," said Belcastel, "within that house are at this moment in the most fearful danger two beings dearer to us than life, the daughter and the niece of De Hommet; behold him defending this spot with all his energies, while he gazes with agonies on the blazing ruins of his hearth. Better commit a breach of duty than see all we love perish before our eyes. If we save them we may yet return in time to assist here; if not, we shall have fallen too."

Claude, equally eager to attempt the rescue of Alix and her relations, at once agreed to the proposition, and, calling to De Hommet, that they would soon return, rushed together from the walls. De Hommet angrily insisted on their remaining, but they were already out of hearing.

"Can I have been deceived in these men?" he exclaimed. "Does their courage fail them at the last? To desert me in such a moment! — Courage friends! stand to your guns: we shall be too much for them yet!"

So saying, his little band continued to keep up a brisk fire against the besiegers, who appeared to have been reinforced, and were now advancing with ladders towards the dilapidated terrace.

Meanwhile Claude and Belcastel had reached the house,

which now sent up from every side columns of flame to the skies;—within, shrieks and cries were heard, and a female shortly afterwards appeared at a window, holding an infant in her arms.

"Save my child!" she cried in piteous accents.

"It is De Hommet's wife, the mother of Lesselline," cried Belcastel, climbing hastily towards the balcony.

"Throw the child to me," he cried, while the mother, frantic with terror, obeyed, and the screaming infant fell upon his breast; he let himself drop upon the pavement, and giving it to one of the crowd, who were surrounding the house, rushed towards the door, which, with the help of Claude and several others, was at length forced. Both hurried along the passage, and directed by the screams of females above reached the room where the cousins were sitting clasped in each other's arms: they had been roused by the firing without, and had risen in haste in order to be ready in case of their services at the hospital being required.

The flames at that moment burst furiously into the chamber; all rushed to the window. Lesselline was in the arms of Belcastel, who looked out with desperate hope; it was not very far from the ground; but how to reach it with his fainting burthen? There was an iron pipe which ran from the top of the house to the bottom, and he felt sure that he could slide down without injury alone.

"Can you clasp me firmly, dear Lesselline?" said he; "bind your scarf round us both for greater security, and tempt the trial."

This was instantly done, the terrified girl clung closely to him, and, standing on the edge of the window-ledge, he seized the pipe, now heated with the increasing fire, and sprang forth; with frightful rapidity he descended, his hands blistered by the burning iron, and just as his feet rested on the ground the arms of Lesselline gave way, and they fell together amongst the smoking ruins below; a dreadful crash was then heard, and as he tore asunder the slight bond that bound them, and raised Lesselline insensible in his arms, he saw that the roof had fallen in.

Claude meanwhile, when he reached the door, through

which the flames were bursting, saw the impossibility of escape that way: he returned to Alix, who with anxious looks was watching the perilous descent of her cousin.

"Where is her mother? my poor aunt!" said she distractedly. "Oh! Claude, think not of me! — the infants! there are three of them, and their mother! what can be done to save them?"

"Perhaps at the back of the house we might escape!" cried Claude. "This way!" But as he spoke the crash which followed the descent of Belcastel and his charge came with awful sound. In a moment the roof fell, and buried them beneath it.

All was now darkness; a suffocating heat spread around, and Claude felt that the form he had instinctively clasped was inanimate. He strove to call aloud, but his voice was powerless; he tried to move, but felt hot substances pressing closely on every side! A hideous sound almost stunned him: there was a roar as of thunder, mixed with what seemed the loud report of cannon, human voices, shrieks, and cries: it seemed impossible to exist many moments in this situation; he struggled violently, but in vain; — he gasped for breath to call on his beloved Alix, who, motionless and silent, replied not to his pressure. A thousand thoughts whirled through his brain: De Hommet struggling with the assailants at the breach; the cannon, the shrieks, the blood of St. Bartholomew's eve; the boatman and the stranger he rescued; and the same female form he had once before seen in a dream — all flitted past as if real and tangible. "I escaped all this," he mentally exclaimed, "and must perish here with her, whom no exertions of mine could save! To die with her is a blessing! — but that her fate should be so horrible!"

He felt his brain reel, his strength giving way; a burning pain seized his limbs, a parching thirst devoured him, and he was losing all consciousness, when a flash, broad, bright, and glowing, suddenly illumined the spot where he stood, to reveal its horrors. He saw that a pile of ruins was round him: two enormous beams had fallen, and in falling crossed each other over his head, forming an arch, which had preserved him; and he hoped for a mo-

ment that Alix was yet living, though still she stirred not. Scarcely, however, could he form this idea, before a second and a third flash poured a flood of radiance into his prison.

"This is no cannon's flash," exclaimed he inwardly; "it is the artillery of heaven!"

The last vivid forked ray was followed by a peal of thunder, so loud, so awful, that he shrank appalled. Then a crash, and deafening explosion, and the wall was rent asunder, falling forward, as if dashed aside by a supernatural hand.

He breathed, he spoke, he called aloud, and he felt the heart of Alix beat beneath his hand; torches gleamed round, and numerous figures flitted about. Presently he heard the sound of voices, and these words struck on his ear: —

"They are saved! Behold them there, below, — behind that heap of brick and rubbish! Claude! Alix! speak! Answer, for the love of Heaven!"

"We are living! I am unhurt!" cried Claude; "but Alix!"

Fifty hands were extended to assist them, and in less time than it takes to tell it they were rescued from their perilous position, and Alix received into the arms of her cousin.

"But, my children! my babes!" cried De Hommet, who came rushing forward from the ruins of his late dwelling. "Have any seen them? Are they saved?"

Search was made, but in vain: no traces could be found of the infants. Their mother, after Belcastel had saved her youngest child, had been rescued by some daring soldiers, who, directed by him, contrived to place ladders against a wall, where she was seen standing, without being able to tell how she had reached that position. The agony of the father was extreme, for there was every reason to fear the two children and their nurse had perished.

Bewildered with the rapidity of these events, Claude entreated Belcastel to explain what had occurred.

He related, that as soon as he had borne Lesselline to a place of safety, with a neighbour, and directed the men to search for Madame de Hommet and the rest, he had hur-

ried back to the rampart, which they had left defended by De Hommet and his small band. He found that the firing had continued with violence, and as he rushed along perceived that a ladder was placed against the breach, and an officer had at that instant reached the topmost step, sword in hand, and encouraging his men to follow: — De Hommet stood in the gap, and made a blow at the officer, who staggered and fell; but another took his place instantly, and before De Hommet could have had time to parry, the thrust must have pierced his body had not Belcastel, springing forward, received the weapon on his own. A furious encounter then ensued; but the officer, who was strong and skilful, pressed the brave but inexperienced student so fiercely that a few moments must have decided his fate, when the whole sky was suddenly illumined by repeated flashes of vivid lightning, and a peal of thunder, which far exceeded the report of a hundred cannon, came rolling through the air; the shock of an earthquake had struck the walls, and the assailants were hurled into the space beyond, while falling houses round told the ruin which attended the mighty effort of convulsed nature.

The besiegers, perceiving that more than mortal aid was with their foes, retired in consternation, having lost several valuable officers and more than a hundred men. De Hommet was not wounded, nor was Belcastel: and the loss on their side was very trifling.

After the tremendous shock which had burst open the walls of the prison of ruins, where Claude and Alix were pent, the storm subsided, and its effects alone remained to prove that the whole had not been a dream.

The unfortunate mother, whose senses had left her for a time, was attended with the most anxious care by her weeping daughter. Alix had received no other bodily injury than a few bruises; but her nerves were much shaken, and a fever was the consequence of the peril and terror to which she had been exposed, added to the state of agitation which, for the last few months, she had endured.

Claude, in the meantime, had not been unmindful of his prisoner, La Mole, to whose comfort and accommodation he had carefully attended. When he entered the

apartment allotted to him the day after the earthquake, he found him on his knees, anxiously engaged in perusing a manuscript book, which Claude recognised as one of a description then in high esteem, namely, a work on divination. He turned round as Claude entered, and rising haughtily requested that he might not be disturbed.

"I am not accustomed to hold parleys with my grooms," said La Mole, scornfully, "and desire to be delivered from all communication with you."

"That you can scarcely be," said Claude, "as you are my prisoner; and perhaps, when you hear that the place I held in your household was but a means of disguise, you will feel less repugnance to the holding a short converse with one who claims nevertheless little in common with you, either in rank or habits. I was entrusted by the Catholic King with a commission to take away your life. You are aware whether I took advantage of my situation, even though I found you to have deeply injured one whom I was bound to assist. I rescued your prisoner, and restored her to her friends; and I now come to you, requiring your word no farther to molest her or her family, before I pronounce that you are free to return whither you may desire."

"Young man," said La Mole, "you have related several things which I own considerably surprise me. First, that the little mad heretic whom I took from René should, in any way, be connected with you; next, that having so good an opportunity of revenge, independently of the chance of a good reward, you should have allowed it to slip from you. As for the kind intentions of the King towards me, I had before shrewd suspicions of them, and shall know how to requite his Grace. For my liberty, I am ready to obtain it by resigning entirely the fair possessed, about whom I am quite indifferent, and for whose sake I have no wish to enter the lists with menials and barbers."

"My Lord," said Claude, "you must swear it on the word of a knight, and you are free, and shall be the first to bear to the camp the message of the Rochellois, who consent to consider of the terms last proposed to them, which, since we have become the stronger, we find are in-

finitely more reasonable than those the King has been hitherto pleased to offer. So known an enemy to the Protestant party is not, I fear, entirely safe in this town; and I recommend as speedy a departure as possible."

"It is likely," said La Mole, coolly, "that your party may not consider me always an enemy. There are other foes, who have, perhaps, stronger claims on me; and they shall not wait long."

Claude had little difficulty in comprehending his meaning, as he knew him to be a zealous friend of the Duke of Anjou.

And however unworthy either the Duke or La Mole might be, their assistance, if hereafter joined to the power of Henry of Navarre, was not to be neglected; and Claude parted with his prisoner pleased with the hope of having secured him to the Huguenot party. He promised that he should be set at liberty in the course of a few days, and La Mole resolved that his sojourn should for the present be as far from the camp or the court as possible.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Les Rochelois ont planté
Le glorieux fondement
De l'antique liberté."—*Popular Song of the Time.*

THE rage of the Catholic party was extreme at the frequent failures they experienced, and the introduction into the besieged town of supplies in spite of all their vigilance. New attempts were made from day to day, but with little gain to themselves and little loss to their foes. Still they were aware, not only that Montgomery's fleet could not approach, but that he had been obliged to abandon the enterprise, and had returned to England, hoping to induce the Queen, by a representation of the deplorable state of the Protestants, to alter her determination, and grant him ships capable of attacking those with which the Catholics had filled the port of La Rochelle.

A short truce was agreed on, but was so ill kept by the Catholics, that, being soon dissolved, hostilities recom-

menced more furiously than ever. La Nouë exerted himself on both sides so much to obtain an accommodation, that a tent was pitched near the second mill, without the town, where the chiefs of either party met to negotiate. Still nothing could be arranged, the bad faith of the King being too apparent, and the prudence of the Rochellois too great to suffer themselves to be deceived.

After each of these *parlemens*, as they were termed, the contest seemed more bitter than before, and nothing appeared left but violence. Whenever the Catholics met with a serious loss, they sent new deputies to propose terms of truce, but merely with a view to gain time. Sometimes the King of Poland would pretend that he had not the power to give answers to the demands of the Rochellois, and must send to Paris to know the will of his brother.

It was during the continuance of one of these treacherous calms that René Bianco arrived at the camp, deputed by King Charles himself to bring his answer to the proposals which had really been sent to him by the Generals, whose desire for honourable accommodation was more sincere than that of the King of Poland.

When Bianco returned to Paris to report the result of his visit to England, he found the Queen-mother in great anxiety, which was not soothed by the account he had to give. The news of the massacre of St. Bartholomew had been very ill received in Poland, so much so that the question was publicly discussed, whether it was advisable for the Duke of Anjou, who was known to have taken so active a part in the affair, to be elected their King at all. The persuasions, and artful representations of Monluc, Protestant Bishop of Valence, a creature of Catherine's, had, however, she trusted, had the desired effect; for, though the absence of her favourite son was to her a serious grief, yet, once elected, she felt that the disgrace of rejection for such a cause would ruin his character throughout Europe; and, added to this, the enmity of Charles to his brother was so undisguised that she feared their meeting, or Henry's remaining in France for the present. Charles had become impatient of the protracted siege, and irritable from illness and the constant stings of remorse. He desired, be-

yond all other things, that his brother should leave the country or be killed at the siege; and, as for the Rochellois, his principal wish now was, to obtain quiet, and conciliate, if possible, the foreign powers, whose contempt and reproaches mortified him extremely. He saw that his plan for the destruction of La Mole had not succeeded, and, by a sudden turn of caprice, he resolved to employ René, as a more fitting instrument than Claude to accomplish his designs. The latter accepted with pleasure an office so congenial to him; and, on his arrival at La Rochelle, was deeply annoyed to find himself again foiled, by learning of the capture of La Mole, the escape of Claude, and of the lady, whom he easily guessed to be Alix.

On delivering the King's instructions to the King of Poland, that Prince was ill pleased to see that they were in a spirit friendly to the Rochellois; and, as he had projected one more vigorous effort to gain the fame which he wanted to dazzle the Poles, he determined to keep back the orders for the present, and commanded René to remain at a distance from the camp, and not to appear till sent for; when, according to the success of his last trial, he should appear to act upon the orders which the Italian was then supposed to bring. He imagined that the Rochellois were now lulled into false security, and, from their exhausted and harassed state, would be unable to sustain an assault made with all his forces. The loss of life was to him no consideration, and, provided he could conquer the foes, for whom he now entertained a personal hatred, he cared not at what sacrifice he procured the pleasure.

It had been agreed that for the space of six days no works should go on, on either side; and the Rochellois, always faithful to their word, desisted from any labours, and reposed from their toils, thus gaining a little strength, and recovering their spirits, and hoping that the answer of the King would at length be favourable. Alix was so much better, that she was able occasionally to resume her post of watcher; and the family of De Hommet, though deeply shocked and grieved by their melancholy loss, yet, actuated by the patriotic spirit which inspired every inhabitant of the town, endeavoured to shake off their sorrow,

and forget their individual distress in exertions for their fellow-sufferers; for theirs was not the only house which had been destroyed on the night of the earthquake, and many families beside had to deplore the loss of those dearest to them. There had been a question as to the propriety of calling the young students to account for the desertion of their post under any temptation, but the services they had rendered on so many occasions overcame the scruples of their officers, who, in consideration of their being unacquainted with the strict rules of war, consented to pardon their fault — one which De Hommet's eloquence, with little difficulty, converted into a virtue.

The inhabitants of the closely-pressed town, who, for so many months had not been able to pause from their exertions for a day, enjoyed the recreation of walking on their walls, and gazing peaceably over the adjacent country; but as they did so, and watched the preparation for a hunting match in the camp, where all seemed careless gaiety, as the soldiers lounged along behind their gabions, and within their prescribed limits, they became aware that the pioneers were busily engaged, and a suspicion of treachery instantly took possession of their minds. To prevent the Catholics from perceiving their knowledge, they made their women and children continue to promenade in the open places, in the view of the camp, and in the meanwhile every man resumed his former occupations; so that at the end of the truce they were fully prepared to receive their besiegers.

Morning had scarcely dawned on the sixth day, when the Rochellois beheld an immense body of the hostile troops advancing; and their batteries began playing with such force against the strong boulevard de l'Evangile, that, however aware of their intention, the besieged with difficulty stood the first shock. An enormous breach was made, and but for the surprise of the Catholics to find their foes so completely on their guard, the fate of the day might have been doubtful; but their confidence received a check, and the boldness and desperate resistance which they encountered considerably abated the hopes which the King of Poland's exhortations had inspired. They were driven

back with the loss of four hundred men, and the Dukes of Mayenne and Nevers wounded. A second and third time they were equally unsuccessful, owing to the destruction of a casemate from which they drew numerous advantages. This work they were obliged to reconstruct, and the Count de Lude led his whole body of infantry once more to the breach.

Furious and desperate now became the contest, and the assailants conceived their success certain, when, with a tremendous explosion, part of the angle of the boulevard blew up. But not a man started from his post, not a hand was unsteady, as resolutely blocking up the enormous breach the Rochellois successfully resisted all attempts, and after an useless assault of three hours the trumpets of the Duke de Biròn sounded a retreat.

Notwithstanding this repulse, and though they had sustained such loss the next day, the battery was recommenced against the long-resisting boulevard.

So powerful were the means employed and so determinedly was the attack conducted, that it was evident the strength of the whole army was directed to the accomplishment of this main object.

At length the fosse became heaped with the ruins of the battered walls, and two wide breaches were effected, through which the entrance to the town seemed open; but, to the surprise of the enemy, they found the entrenchments behind so strong, and so well flanked by the industry of the soldiers during the attack, that the new defence was more formidable than the old.

Rendered furious by this disappointment, the Count de Lude led on his men to the counterscarp of the Porte St. Nicholas, while new troops poured in upon the Evangile. The Rochellois began to faint; such repeated attacks allowed them no breathing time, and the report of the fosse being filled with ruins, spreading through the lines, carried panic along with it: the shouts of the enemy soon proclaimed that both these strongholds were in their power; Claude and Belcastel were fighting, side by side, defending the entrance of one of the breaches, when the cry of victory from the opposite party reached their ears.

"Comrades!" cried Claude; "without a desperate effort all is lost. Why fight we here merely on the defensive when yonder leaders are giving way? Follow me, and the day is yet our own!"

A shout from Belcastel and his company announced their willingness to attempt any thing, however desperate. Exhorting those who remained, to be firm to their post, Claude rushed like lightning along the walls, insisting, entreating, commanding, and encouraging all.

"Yet another struggle!" cried he, "yet another, and La Rochelle is free. Desert not your post, brave soldiers, at the last decisive moment. On for the love of Heaven, — for your wives and children whose fate depends on you. Remember St. Bartholomew! — La Rochelle and vengeance!"

The animation of his address, the fire of his eye, the rapidity of his movements as he rushed along, as if resolved to attempt the regaining the lost holds alone, recalled the scattered spirits of the soldiers. One universal cry of "La Rochelle and victory! — St. Bartholomew and vengeance!" resounded along the walls, and in a few minutes l'Evangile and the gate of St. Nicholas were once more possessed by the victorious Rochellois. The besiegers, driven back with great slaughter, leaped from the walls, rushed through the breaches, and piled the fosse with dead and wounded.

The victory of the brave Rochellois was complete, and the remains of the late numerous army, with immense loss, returned to the camp.

Greatly were the successful besieged astonished to hear in the evening of that day, for five successive hours, both by land and by sea, repeated bursts of artillery, as if in rejoicing for some signal victory. More than two hundred and fifty reports of cannon were heard, and various were the conjectures raised as to the cause. While they were busied in questioning each other, a white pennon was suddenly seen flying from the top of the tour de Moreilles where Alix kept watch, and soon after were observed advancing rapidly, without attempt at molestation from the vessels of the enemy, several small ships which, taking

their course direct into the harbour, were received with shouts of greeting. They were amply loaded with biscuit, corn, flour, fish, and every kind of provision, of all of which the half-starving population stood eminently in need.

They were not long in receiving a message from La Nouë, who informed them that the rejoicings they heard were in consequence of the arrival of the Polish ambassadors at the camp, and the proclamation of Henry as King of Poland. That King Charles, in honour of the event, had sent down by a special courier, to proclaim peace throughout the cantons, and to grant to the Rochellois all their demands.

This joyful news was speedily confirmed by the arrival of La Nouë himself, who entered the town amidst the joyful greeting of the inhabitants, followed soon after by the Duke de Biròn, his staff, and a herald-at-arms, who confirmed, by sound of trumpet in every part of the town, the peace which they had so hardly earned. After this, a grand banquet, prepared in all haste, was given to the late besiegers at the mayoralty ; the soldiers of each party embracing and welcoming each other, and every demonstration of amity given and received.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

VOLUME THE THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

PLOTTING.

"It fits us then to be as provident
As fear may teach us."—*Henry V.*

The struggle maintained on both sides with so much obstinacy was at length concluded, and all haste seemed to be instantly made to finish that which had been so abruptly stopped, and to get rid at once of the contention. The King of Navarre and the Prince of Condé lost no time in hastening from a scene which was distressing to their feelings. The King of Poland hurried to the Isle of Oleron, to await the Edict of Pacification, and to give audience to the Polish Ambassadors,—all the noblesse departed as quickly as possible—the remnant of the immense army began to disperse—the merchants packed up their goods, and the camp was dissolved.

Small honour had been gained, and great loss incurred, by the ill-advised and cruel policy that counselled the siege; in which no less than eighty thousand men had perished by the sword or by sickness. Charles, terrified at the effect which might be made on the Polish nation, more than half-inclined to reject their newly-elected monarch, was resolved, as quickly as he could, to do away with the impression Henry of Valois's want of success must occasion. The rigour shown in so many recent instances was looked on throughout Europe with disgust and reprehension, and it appeared absolutely requisite that this disagreeable feeling should be effaced.

Catherine's hopes that some of those she considered her enemies would perish in the contest, were disappointed; instead of which many excellent officers, and a large body of men, had fallen a sacrifice, and her beloved son was more

than once wounded. The mission of René had failed, which inspired Charles with bitter feelings, and, on the whole, the most gloomy and unquiet thoughts reigned in the breasts of the ruling powers on the breaking-up of the siege of La Rochelle.

La Mole, as soon as he quitted his prison, made haste to conceal himself and his discomfiture in one of his country-houses in Provence, — resolved to make his absence regretted by the fair ones of Paris, and to cause some sighs from Margaret of Navarre. His friend Coconnas accompanied him, and it was not long before they were joined by the Duke d' Anjou, the Marshals de Montmorenci and Cossi, and others, when that conspiracy was formed which so soon afterwards cost their lives to the prime movers of the affair. It was arranged that, to prevent suspicion, La Mole and the rest should go to Paris and be present at the fêtes projected in honour of the election of the King of Poland; which, under the direction of the Queen-mother, were to be of the most magnificent description, the poet Dorat being engaged to compose the masques, and to record the solemnities. Much treachery and many deep designs were communicated at this meeting, as having been discovered in various ways; not only did La Mole recount what he had learned from Claude of the King's intentions towards him, but it was found that in case of success at La Rochelle, a deep plot had been laid to get rid of all those inimical to the Queen-mother and the King of Poland. In particular, that Du Guast, the reigning favourite of Henry, had undertaked to assassinate the King of Navarre with his own hand, — that the Duke de Guise and Catherine had entered into a compact to destroy those whom they considered dangerous to their views, — that Charles had his emissaries, whose intentions were as well known, and, in fact, that a second St. Bartholomew had alone been prevented by the brave defence of the Rochellois, and the consequent necessity of raising the siege.

The Prince de Condé, who had been informed of the numerous letters and messengers sent from the camp to his young wife by the King of Poland, felt his pride alarmed, and resolved to withdraw the object of this dangerous af-

fection from the neighbourhood of the unprincipled Prince, and Marie was therefore compelled to leave Chenonçeau, and accompany her husband to Normandy; where, though strict watch was kept over him by the royal party, he was yet permitted, for a time, to visit his government; the Queen-mother having perceived with vexation that the passion of her son had become more violent and lasting than she thought his volatile nature would have permitted. As she knew that Marie, notwithstanding her youth and simplicity, was possessed of great genius and determination, which in after years might be dangerous, she was glad to find the means of removing a rival whose power she dreaded, looking forward as she did to the time when, Henry reigning, she should be all in all, provided she could unite him in marriage with some less attractive and less gifted princess. She had already decided in her own mind that Louise de Lorraine, daughter of the Duke de Mercœur, her own connection, would be a fitting match, and she took her measures accordingly. By favouring the house of Lorraine she weakened that of Bourbon, and her dread that Henry would supplant her sons grew daily more and more vivid.

The grief of parting with her friend, and leaving the Court without beholding her lover, threw the unfortunate Marie into a fever, and when she arrived at her solitary château in Normandy, she was laid upon a bed of sickness.

The King of Poland, on finding her absent, was deeply chagrined, and vented so many reproaches on his mother for not having prevented it, that she the more congratulated herself on the circumstance. To sooth him, she promised to forward his views in every way, and bade him rely on her to facilitate their marriage when he once became King of France.

As for the Queen of Navarre, she was inconsolable at the loss of Marie; and the return of her husband, in whose palace at Paris she was now expected to reside, brought her little happiness; for his coldness to her, and his inconstancy and carelessness in matters of gallantry, had become a common theme. The designs he was forming with his friends he concealed beneath this exterior, and Marguerite

was herself deceived when she saw him entering, with apparent enjoyment, into all the dissipation of the time. To follow his example seemed the only course left her; and none to behold her, brilliant, beautiful, and gay, acting a conspicuous part in the magnificent entertainments given to the ambassadors of Poland, could have guessed the disappointment and bitterness of her heart. She, with all the most beautiful and most fascinating ladies of the Court, accompanied the King of Poland, on his way to his new dominions, as far as Blamont in Champagne.

The Queen-mother had persuaded King Charles to undertake the journey, although his health was failing fast, and at Vetry great fears were entertained for his life. He was attacked, it was reported, by small-pox; but strange rumours were spread that the drugs of René Bianco in which he appeared of late to have much faith, had not been found so salutary to his health as he imagined. His youth, however, prevailed, and the momentary expectations of Catherine, that Henry would not be obliged to quit the kingdom, were deceived. As long as possible, however, the King of Poland lingered, until at last Charles, observing his disinclination to depart, had recourse to threats and menaces to oblige him to quit France, and amidst the weeping and mourning of his mother and his friends the accomplished, profligate, and unprincipled Prince set out with the ambassadors for Warsaw.

Meantime, though fair promises and good words were not spared to lull the victorious Rochellois into a false security, yet the dignitaries of the town remained resolute on their guard against treachery.

Belcastel and Claude, equally the objects of gratitude and esteem to those whom they had so materially served, were not long in learning from each other their mutual secret. It appeared that the former had been for some time attached to Lesselline, the daughter of De Hommet; and as he was possessed of a small independence, her father had no reasons to advance against his happiness, considering him master of talents which promised success in whatever career he might pursue. The dower of Lesseline was considerable, and the sole objection which De Hommet urged

was the youth of both parties, an argument which the eloquence of Belcastel so effectually subdued, that the union of the lovers was at length consented to, and the day fixed for the celebration of the event.

Claude, while he rejoiced in his friend's good fortune could not but compare it with his own situation with melancholy reflections. Alix shared his sadness, though she carefully concealed her feelings under an assumed gaiety, proper for the occasion of her cousin's marriage. Claude sought opportunities of seeing her alone, but could seldom do so except for a few moments; at length, on one occasion, he ventured to entreat a short hearing, and his request not being denied—

"Alix," said he, "you once said that under other circumstances than those in which we were placed when I ventured to avow to you the feelings of my heart, I should have been heard with less coldness; you even said that you felt reget at our parting; might I hope the esteem with which you then honoured me is not abated?"

"Claude," answered she, in a faltering voice, "I am here almost unprotected; ought you to remind me of a confession—an acknowledgment——"

"Dearest Alix," exclaimed he; "recall not that word which gives me hope. Hear me, at least, and forgive me if I say too much; you can command my silence—for ever if it pleases you. Believe me I presume not on your present situation:—did I address one word that might offend you while you trusted in the protection I was able to afford?"

"No," replied Alix, turning on him a look of grateful affection; "no, Claude; I am to blame to require so much of you,—nay, why should I longer deceive you and myself by feigning an indifference which is so far from my heart? I need not,—I do not hesitate to tell you that you are dear to me; and that all the anxiety which you have experienced has been shared by me since our last, nay—since our first meeting."

"Generous, beloved Alix!" cried he, pressing to his heart the hand she extended to him, "do not then again expose yourself to a separation fraught with danger,—let

me be your guard—your protector, with none to question my right. The President will pardon the step you have taken, since it secures his daughter's safety."

"But my fatal promise!" cried Alix, turning pale.

"It was extorted under circumstances of such horror that its fulfilment were profanation. Think not of it for a moment—let not the remembrance of the vile Bianco disturb your tranquillity—you will be safe from him; we will live far from the Court, and all its dangers and vices."

"But, Claude," said Alix, "I cannot abandon my father, and he will not give up the fatal fascination which dwells round the abode of royalty. Alas! he is not like De Hommet; and our being Protestants is a bar that——"

"Dwell not, I entreat," said her lover, "on the difficulties that surround us:—think, dearest Alix, of your safety, and accept the protection of one who, however powerless in some respects, has at least a life to devote to you!"

"Believe me not," she answered, smiling through her tears, "so unworthy of your attachment as to consider such a reason necessary. My happiness and my safety depend equally on you, and dowerless and persecuted, I am but too unfitting a bride for one so generous and noble."

Claude at length succeeded in convincing her that there could be no possible objection to their union, and his ardent imagination, seeing nothing in the future but bright prospects, passed over all the dark shadows which were but too conspicuous in the foreground of the picture.

Belcastel and his intended bride heard with extreme pleasure that the day of their marriage was to be that of Alix and Claude; and De Hommet had neither power nor inclination to refuse such a reward to one of the deliverers of La Rochelle.

The happiness of the bridal party would have been complete, but that the sad loss of the two children of De Hommet had left a melancholy on the minds of all, which they could not banish. The eldest of the children, a boy of six years of age, had been the pride and delight of his parents, and was called the little rival of Claude, so

attached had he become to Alix during her stay; the other was a girl about three years old, and a remarkably lovely, engaging child. Their nurse was a country girl from Croisic in Brittany, and greatly attached to them. All trace had been lost of their fate: the ruins were so extensive, that to dig amongst them was a work of time, and the confusion of the whole town was so great that the search had been abandoned.

De Hommet was gazing from the walls one morning, with a sad heart, recalling to his mind a thousand little traits of his beloved and lost children, when he observed a small sail approaching the sands at the foot of the tower from which he leaned. He watched it carelessly as it struggled through the waters and reached the shore, when a sound caught his ear which he never hoped to hear again — the sound of his own name in the accents of his son. He rushed down the stairs — flew towards the boat, and at the same moment clasped in his arms his two lost children, while their nurse stood sobbing by his side. A brief explanation was soon given of their rescue by a fishing boat, which bore them safely off in the midst of the fray, and the overjoyed father, hurrying with his recovered treasure to the abode of Lesseline, spread joy and wonder round.

CHAPTER II.

THE COURTIER'S FATE.

"And wee'll have hawkes and wee'll have houndes
To cover our intent,
And wee'll awaye to the green forest
As we a hunting went."
Marriage of Sir Gawain.

Les plus heureux portoient envie
Aux félicités de ma vie;
Mais maintenant que je suis mort —
Oh que Fortune est variable!
Il n'y a nul si misérable
Qui voulût envier mon sort.
Epitaphe du jeune La Mole.

During the progress of the Court towards St. Germain, the indications of revolt among the Huguenots were so

clearly manifested, and their opinions so boldly avowed, that suspicions were excited in the King's mind that they had unknown resources, and looked with confidence to leaders whose power they could not doubt.

The Duke of Anjou, for so Francis the youngest brother of the King was now called, had in fact placed himself at the head of a third party, who, while they acted in concert with the Huguenots, had their private views of aggrandisement and revenge. They called themselves Malcontentes or Politiques, because the party was composed of all those who conceived themselves to have been ill-treated by the Court, and because their professed aim was to reform the abuses of government.

La Nouë, under pretence of a religious ceremony which was to take place at La Rochelle, determined the inhabitants—who, wearied with long contentions, were at first undecided as to whether or not they should enter into any new scheme—to accept him once more as their guide. Under his directions their walls were repaired, their magazines replenished, and La Nouë was unanimously declared governor of their town, as well as of all the places in Poitou, Saintonge, and the Angoumois attached to the Protestant interest.

All their measures were taken with caution and judgment, and it was agreed that a body of cavalry should be ready near St. Germain, where the Court was by this time assembled, in order to carry off, as if by force, the Duke of Anjou, who should immediately be placed at the head of affairs. Everything appeared to wear a favourable aspect, when, through the indiscreet advice of La Mole, the Duke, weak and unstable, was induced to alter the arrangement, and the plan was abandoned.

Catherine had seen the necessity of amusing the minds of those about her, and knowing the weakness of her son, and the fondness for dissipation of her Court, she had announced a series of fêtes to be given in honour of the King of Poland's election.

The Queen of Navarre was to preside over the festivities which were to take place at St. Germain, and La Mole, whose favour with D'Anjou and his party had lately

become very great, could not make up his mind to relinquish the satisfaction his vanity derived from being distinguished by the public regard of Marguerite, to which he had so long aspired. He hesitated not to sacrifice the interests of his party to his selfish gratification, and prevailed on the easy Duke to relinquish his design of joining the Huguenots till after the fêtes were over.

René, had readily undertaken the Queen's commission to discover the secret workers in the suspected plot. He attached himself to La Mole with all the assiduity of which his servile nature was capable, and without much difficulty contrived to lull his suspicions, while he pretended to act in concert with Ruggieri, to forward the views of gallantry or ambition of the thoughtless and vicious courtier. The certain information which he had contrived to obtain respecting the Protestant plot was the cause of Catherine's present scheme, and, as she had hoped, all fell into the snare.

The entertainments were as usual of the most splendid description, and lasted several days.

Late on the evening of the second, René and the King met in a covered walk in the gardens of the palace, and the former received his employer's directions relative to a new attempt to be made on La Mole's life. Charles, being ignorant of his mother's intentions, thought this a fitting time to execute his purpose, and René, though aware of the mode of action meditated by the Queen, was willing to make sure of his victim at once, rather than trust to the uncertain conclusion of a state trial, which, in fact, awaited the treasonable proceedings of La Mole.

"René," said the King, "this minion must not escape me again. La Mole shall die, if my own hands must do the deed."

"It shall not need," answered René; "Crucé the butcher, whom your grace knows to be a sure hand, will be here anon with the cords; and he will be strangled quickly, and thought to have died from the effects of too forcible carousing."

"This is well," said Charles eagerly, "I did not care to

have the dagger used — I wish not to see more blood — and poison is not always sure, methinks."

René smiled as he looked on the fragile fading form of the King, and thought differently.

"Would this fellow were come," continued Charles, looking down one of the alleys — then suddenly shrinking, he added, "he is advancing — you say he does not know me."

"No," replied Bianco, "he imagines your Grace one of our party; be not startled at his conversation; he is brutal and coarse, but one on whom we may depend."

Charles muffled himself in his mantle, and though the night was mild he shivered violently. Crucé, the hero of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, presently approached: he held in his hand a coil of rope, and walked towards them with an indifferent air.

"This is poor work," said he to René. Why employ the cord when the stab would do as well? This is against my practice, though I understand for that matter one as well as the other. Captain Florio, who has been a great traveller, has taught me a trick or two of the Indians with the cord, and I begin rather to take to it. One has only to go softly behind one's man, and check! he's throttled at once." As he spoke he suited his words with action, coming near the King, who shrank appalled, and his cheek became paler as he faltered, addressing himself to René, in a low voice:

"Let us come this way; La Mole must pass through this passage as he returns from my mother's to Anjou's apartments, where the rebels are now scheming mischief."

"If our man be an Huguenot," said Crucé, "there is little need of three of us. Leave him to me, for I have had practice among them of late. Why, in one day I killed eighty," added he, striking the King on the shoulder, who started with a guilty shudder from his touch.

René interposing, exclaimed, "Ay, master Thomas, but this is no Huguenot with whom we have to deal. May one not find enemies amongst the faithful?"

"Oh, that may be," answered his brutal associate: "for that matter, my conscience is not nice, witness for one the

old canon of Notre Dame, Rouillard, who, good Catholic as he was, got not out of my house in the mêlée for an ancient grudge I owed him."

René laughed, and Charles joined in the merriment.

"Comrade," said Crucè, after a long pause, in which all parties seemed to grow impatient, "have you heard of this waxen image which they say has been made of the King by La Mole, to betwitch him? He wont live long, that's easily seen; and they say, as it melts away before a slow fire, he'll die by inches—the heart is pierced with pins and——"

A groan from Charles interrupted him, while Bianco quickly interposed—

"Hush!" said he, for as he held the King's arm he observed that he trembled violently; "speak not, or we frighten away our game."

While this scene was passing in one part of the gardens, the object of this secret ambush, on descending the stairs from the Queen's apartment, was met by a page, whose mysterious gestures invited him to pause.

"My Lord," said the youth, "I am commissioned to bid you seek the casement of a chamber at the south side of the palace, where you will in due time be admitted, and learn things which much concern your welfare."

"How?" said La Mole; "by what token may I know whether or not to trust you?"

"By this," said the page, putting into his hand a silver marguerite or daisy: "fail not, as you value the favour of her who wore it."

La Mole instantly recognised the flower, worn as an emblem by the young Queen of Navarre, and giving the page a reward, hastened towards the spot which had been indicated to him, his heart swelling with pride and exultation at the honour conferred on him by the illustrious lady who thus proved her sensibility to his devotion.

He hurried along occupied with a thousand pleasing thoughts, and was soon at the opposite end of the palace to that occupied by the Duke of Anjou and himself, and thus avoiding, however, unconsciously, the snare prepared for him by King Charles.

The night was now dark, and the dying illuminations served but to render the gloom deeper. He approached the window, but no light was to be seen; no appearance indicated that his visit was expected. For some time he remained patiently leaning against a pillar, watching anxiously for a signal which should inform him that his vicinity was known to those within.

At length a gleam of light broke through the casement above, and he saw it descending till it shone beneath a doorway near where he was stationed. The door slowly unclosed, and a female figure cautiously looked out: he approached, and, being recognised, was desired to follow. He did so, and found himself conducted through a range of apartments to one where, his guide pausing, the arras was drawn back, and he stood in the presence of Marguerite de Valois. The romance which he had been cherishing in his mind as he pursued his way, vanished instantly on observing the air of severity with which the Princess received him, and he saw that two of her ladies were in attendance on her. She blushed slightly, as she addressed these words to him, —

"My Lord, I have required your presence here in order to obtain information from you on a subject which involves not only your own safety, but that of others in whom I am interested. You must answer me without reserve, as I am actuated by a desire to serve you; and on your confidence in my good intentions much depends."

La Mole, alarmed by the unusual gravity of the Princess, whom he had left but a short time before all smiles and gaiety, answered by professions of sincerity, and entreaties to be honoured by her commands.

"The Duke my brother, and the King of Navarre," said she, "are suspected of treasonous designs towards the King. What know you of their intentions?"

La Mole, assuming all the effrontery of his nature, replied, "Your Highness is deceived, and amazes me by the question ——"

He was interrupted by Marguerite — "You are Anjou's friend, and, doubtless, his confidant; it is useless, therefore, to affect ignorance of his plans. I will, however,

spare your conscience the necessity of equivocation, and tell you at once that all is known, that danger will ensue; —his movements are watched; and but a few hours are left to escape the consequences of his imprudence. Ruggieri is artful, and René is your foe. A late affair, in which the latter considers himself wronged by you"—the Princess uttered these words with angry emphasis,— "has induced him to seek your destruction."

"Is it possible, madam," said La Mole, much mortified to find his adventures so well known to the Princess,— "that a mistake, a trifle like that can occasion his anger? I assure your Highness that the female in question ——"

"I require no explanation on that head," said Marguerite haughtily,—"all I desire to know is,—have you, in conjunction with Ruggieri, made a waxen figure with the intent to injure the health of the King?"

La Mole started:—"What do I hear?" cried he. "Can your Highness conceive so improbable an idea?"

"Satisfy me instantly, La Mole," exclaimed the Princess passionately; "if it be true that you have practised against the life or health of my brother, I renounce all wish, all attempt to save you."

La Mole, struck with her impetuosity, and dreading some hidden danger for which he was unprepared; aware also of Marguerite's character for generosity, added to a hope he entertained that he was not indifferent to her, ventured to say: "If your Highness would condescend to allow me a few moment's private audience I should be able satisfactorily to explain what I am not at liberty to disclose to others."

Marguerite hesitated, but at length desired her attendants to withdraw to the adjoining closet; and La Mole, now without witnesses, spoke as follows:

"If the most presumptuous of mortals may hope for pardon from one endowed with beauty and graces unparalleled, I would disclose to your Highness a secret which I hoped to have concealed from all the world.

"It is indeed true that a waxen image has been made by Ruggieri and myself, and that I have dared to utter prayers and charms before it; but it was to answer a far

different purpose than that of which I am accused — it was to melt a heart as hard as its possessor is fair, to render propitious to the vows of the truest of lovers, a peerless lady, who——"

"How!" said Marguerite, colouring deeply, and in much agitation, "I knew your Lordship's heart was ever open to new impressions; but I deemed not such means necessary to secure the affections of one."

"This one, madam," said the courtier, "is superior to all the beauties that exist, and so exalted above my humble state, that nothing less than a miracle could make her cast her eyes my way."

"Name her instantly," said Marguerite, trembling.

"Ah, Madam!" cried La Mole, falling at her feet, and looking on her with an expression of despairing submission, —"it is *La fleur des fleurs — la choix des Marguerites!*"

"Is it indeed so?" exclaimed the Princess, recovering her breath, which, in an agony of offended pride and insulted dignity, she had withheld; — "and does the Queen of Navarre hear this avowal? Rise, my Lord," added she in a haughty tone, "and know that this presumption is as unwelcome as it is unlooked for."

"No, madam," said he, still prostrate at her feet, "I rise not till your lips pronounce my pardon. When Rudel lay dead at the feet of his beloved lady, did she frown, did she spurn him from her? — And am I not dead to hope, even like that unfortunate troubadour? You caused my fault, therefore you owe me pardon. Oh! pardon, gracious mistress!"

These words were spoken in accents of the deepest feeling, and with an air of profound respect, as well as hopeless sorrow. Marguerite allowed herself to be satisfied by them, and suffered him to rise with an assurance of her forgiveness; which she accorded in consideration of his not having entertained a design to injure her royal brother. She obtained from him the avowal of his connection with the Duke of Anjou's conspiracy.

"And now," said she, as she summoned her attendants, "know from me that the Princes are suspected by the Queen-mother; that she waits but the completion of the

festivities to seize on their persons; and that their only chance of safety is, under some pretence, to withdraw as early as possible from the Court, and escape whither they can. You must follow their example; but in the meantime, go not to-night to the Duke's apartments, — I know from sure authority that ruffians are stationed in the garden with an intent to assassinate you. Remain concealed here till morning; and, as soon as day is risen, hasten to the Duke with the counsel you have just received."

At these words she withdrew, leaving La Mole overcome with surprise and consternation. He followed the attendants, who conducted him to a chamber, and throwing himself on a couch, passed the hours in anxious doubt and uneasy foreboding.

Meanwhile the long night wore on, and the King's impatience began to exceed all bounds. The weather had changed: it was cold; and the damps of night struck him with a shivering chill, fevered as he was with excited feelings, and weak from long indisposition. At length, all thoughts of the arrival of their victim began to fade; and, as grey morning dawned, Charles, unable longer to endure the nervous agitation he felt, quitted his confederates, and, directing them to remain till daylight, he, with faltering steps, returned to his own apartment.

The next day La Mole allowed the morning to be but little advanced before he visited the Duke of Anjou, to whom he recounted the adventure of the preceding night; and, alarming his fears of impending danger, it was immediately resolved that, under pretence of hunting, the two Princes accompanied by La Mole, the Count de Coconnas, and several other noblemen, should, without loss of time, attempt an escape.

Their horses were got ready with as little delay as possible, and without arms, to avoid suspicion, they prepared for their expedition; when a message was suddenly delivered to them from the Queen-mother, desiring them to attend till she should join their party, as she proposed having the pleasure of hunting with them. However annoyed at this delay, they were obliged to consent with a good grace, and, in a short time, Catherine and several of her ladies

were ready to set out. The cavalcade quitted the palace, and proceeded on its way; the two Princes, and those of their party, casting uneasy glances on each other as they rode along, each revolving in his mind some means of evading the keen suspicions of the wily Catherine.

They had entered the woods, and the chase commenced. It was then that the leaders of the party determined to make a desperate effort; and, setting spurs to their horses, they darted through the avenues, and were soon lost to the sight of the Queen and her attendants.

The opposite borders of the wood were now almost gained, and they began to breathe freely, when to their astonishment and dismay they found themselves suddenly surrounded by a troop of armed men; some of whom, advancing and seizing the reins of the foremost, exclaimed, "My Lords, her Grace and her party have commanded us to conduct you back to them,—the speed of your horses has occasioned such alarm in their minds, that it is only your immediate return that can assure them of your safety. Let none attempt to continue the chase under pain of her Grace's displeasure."

Though these words were pronounced in a respectful tone, it was but too evident that they covered a deeper meaning, and the appearance of the troop showed the inutility of resistance; the Princes were therefore reluctantly compelled to turn their horses' heads and rejoin the Queen; who, instead of returning to St. Germain, expressed her intention of proceeding immediately to Vincennes, for which place the King and all his suite had already set out.

Arrived at the castle, Catherine summoned the Duke and the King of Navarre to a private audience; and there addressing them in a severe tone, she informed them that they had not in future her permission to quit the apartments they occupied.

"How, madam," said the Duke, "are we prisoners then without having committed any crime?"

"Anjou," replied the Queen, "attempt not to deceive me; your wit is of too poor a nature. I know well all your schemes. Reply not,—you have gone too far, and deserve to suffer; but I would not have my son, nor the husband

of my daughter disgraced. Remain passive in this business, and no harm shall reach you. You will be too well guarded to escape; therefore I counsel you not to attempt it. For the traitors whom you have encouraged to rebellion they shall pay the forfeit of their crime."

In vain did Anjou and Henry entreat her mercy for their companions. Resolved and unshaken, Catherine smiled at their vehemence, and dismissed them without affording the slightest hope to their anxious demands.

The destination of their associates was what might have been anticipated from the characters of Charles and his mother. They had determined to make single examples of the culprits, and all on whom suspicion rested were forthwith conducted under a strong guard to the prisons of the grand châtelet. It was there that La Mole was delivered over to the governor of this place of confinement, and by him consigned to the jailor as a prisoner accused of high treason, who was to await his trial.

The accomplished and refined courtier heard himself addressed by a coarse-looking man, of brutal appearance, who inquired of the governor into what dungeon he should conduct the prisoner. He was desired to consult the party concerned, and turned his inquiries on La Mole.

"I have accommodation," said he, "for all ranks; tell me, therefore, on which list you choose to be placed."

"Conduct me where you will," said the unfortunate courtier: "I am perfectly indifferent."

"Then you are a fool for your pains," growled the jailor, "for when there is good choice one may be nice — *qui a des noix il en casse, qui n'en a il s'en passe.* Now, mark me; in this, our palace, there are, besides many not worth boasting of, ten chambers, as comfortable as any I would wish to place a Christian gentleman in; if, indeed, you are a Jew or a Huguenot, I can't promise you much; but for a person of condition, look you, there is, first, La Salle," — he continued to enumerate them, counting on his fingers — "La Motte, Les Chaînes, Beauvoir, Les Boucheries, Beaumont, La Grièche, Beauvais, Barbarie, and Gloriette. For six deniers a night you have a good bed, and all your heart can desire, paying every day, for the trouble I take in attending to you, the sum of ——"

"Silence," said La Mole, impatiently, "take me to the best of your horrible abodes, and cease this impertinent clamour; there will be no demur about your gains."

"Truly, my dainty minion," muttered the man, as he sullenly led the way, "you may thank me for not taking you to the Fin d'Aise, or the Chausse d'Hypocras, where we let down the prisoners through a hole, like a bucket into a well; methinks 'tis a place good enough."

Once arrived in the miserable receptacle allotted to him, La Mole abandoned himself to all the horrors of despair. He well knew the implacable character of Catherine, and the certainty of being sacrificed to her fondness for the King of Poland, against whose interest the plot in which he had been engaged was directed; he knew, also, the hatred borne him by Charles, and was aware of the numerous failures the latter had experienced in his attempts to rid himself of a detested object; and he saw clearly that his doom was sealed, while in the bitterness of his heart he cursed the authors of the plot, and himself for having consented to enter into it. Remorse for the cruelties he had committed, which had never before found entrance into his mind, now asserted its sway, and all the blackness of his crimes cast their huge shadows around him; his ears rung with the cries of his dying victims, — mangled and ghastly forms seemed to flit before his eyes, and he cast himself on the floor of his dungeon, uttering loud and frantic shrieks.

The trial of this vain and unfortunate man followed soon after. Great stress was laid on the discovery of the waxen image, and as his fate was determined beforehand, he was at once condemned. The courage which had forsaken him in his prison returned not at the final moment; terror deprived him of all power to kiss the sacred symbol offered to him, and his last words were a strange medley of the devotion he had been accustomed to practise, and the gallantry which habit had rendered natural to him.

"May the Father and the blessed Virgin," he exclaimed, "have mercy on my soul!—commend me to the Queen of Navarre, and to the ladies."

Violent tremblings and torrents of tears accompanied

him to his execution, and after his death it was discovered that he wore a shirt of Our Lady of Chartres, which had always formed part of his dress, as it was his hope that by this means he should secure the Divine blessing, in the midst of all the sins which he was in the daily habit of committing.

La Mole suffered not the punishment of treason alone; the death of his companion, the hardened and unfeeling Coconnas, followed immediately after; and the trial of both these courtiers brought to light an infinity of circumstances, involving the safety of many persons on whom no suspicion had fallen. Among others, René, ever watchful of his own ends, was careful to bring forward proof to criminate Ruggieri. He contrived this, however, so craftily and secretly, that the Queen mother was ignorant of the fact of his being accused, and the victim himself, though he could not but entertain suspicion of the real author of his misfortune, could obtain no certainty, and was staggered in his opinion by the apparent frankness and friendly manner of his enemy, who visited him in prison, and offered him all the alleviation possible for him to bestow.

The judgment of the Courts condemned him to the galleys, after having publicly undergone the punishment of the pillory.

The day was fixed for the infliction of this ignominious sentence, and René exulted in the success of his schemes of vengeance.

The state of the King's health prevented his removal from Vincennes; but the Queen-mother, on the very day in question, made a journey into Paris, being anxious not to leave that city too long without her presence in these times of rebellion and confusion. She had made some progress through the streets, when suddenly the cries and exclamations of the people became so loud and violent as to alarm her. In spite of all the address of René, who trembled lest she should discover the truth, and who had in vain endeavoured to prevent her ill-timed visit, Catherine insisted on the cavalcade stopping, and the cause of the tumult being ascertained. An officer rode up, and informed her that it was in consequence of a criminal being dragged to punishment for having been concerned in the

late rebellion, and in forming the figure of virgin wax for the culprit La Mole, with an intent to take away the King's life.

"How!" exclaimed Catherine, turning pale; "are there then more subjects so vile? Who is this monster?"

The officer hesitated, knowing the rank Ruggieri had held in her favour, and, conceiving that he suffered with her knowledge, dreading to offend by reminding her of his unworthiness.

The Queen turned on him an angry glance. "Must I ask twice?" cried she. "Who is this wretch?"

"May it please your Grace," answered the officer, "it is Cosmo Ruggieri, the Florentine."

The eyes of the Queen-mother flashed fire; she turned her stern and angry countenance towards René, who attended by her carriage door.

"False slave!" said she, "did you not tell me Cosmo was absent visiting a sick relation? You knew of his danger, and apprised me not of it. Go, instantly, and command his release in my name; go," she repeated, vehemently; "you, René, you shall be the instrument of saving him whom you would have injured."

Her impatient signal was obeyed by Bianco, who, finding that matters had taken a turn so unfavourable to his wishes, conceived it advisable to submit with a good grace; without, therefore, attempting to utter a word of excuse, he hurried forward to the place of execution.

There existed in Paris several pillories; that at which Cosmo was to be exposed was in the Halles, not far from an ancient fountain. Its form was octagon, lantern-shaped, and open on all sides, and, like most of the buildings at that period, presented in its architecture a degree of elegance scarcely suited to its purpose. The open sides were finished by pointed arches, and the crockets which adorned it were gracefully fashioned. This upper part of the building was of wood, and its high pointed roof was surmounted by a vane. The immense lantern turned on a pivot, being fixed on a tower of solid masonry, beside which sheds were erected. The culprit, whose head and hands were placed in the receptacles for them, was

occasionally whirled round in his elevated position, in order that the mob might have a better view of him.

In this plight stood Cosmo Ruggieri, the favourite of the Queen, when René, pressing through the crowd, called aloud to the magistrates to suspend the execution of his punishment in her Majesty's name.

Much to the disappointment of the mob, who uttered unqualified expressions of their contempt and hatred of the Italian favourites as a body, and their royal mistress herself, whose popularity was decreasing every day, the order which René brought was obeyed, and the astrologer released from his degrading station, and carried into a chamber beneath. Here René endeavoured to persuade him that he had been the cause of his release, and had induced Catherine to come to Paris with no other view than by her presence to deliver him from the dangerous position in which he had only just discovered him to be.

"My good friend," said René, "I rely on you to set the matter right with the Queen, who most unjustly supposes that I have not exerted myself to serve you. You know with what zeal I have attempted your rescue, and how often I have visited you in your calamity."

"It is true," said Cosmo, grateful for his release, and confused with the rapidity of events, "and I will take care to represent it to Catherine."

René, with exultation in his eye, conducted the rescued prisoner to the Queen's carriage, attended by guards, who kept him from the violence of the shouting mob. Catherine ordered Ruggieri to be placed in a litter belonging to some of her suite, and condescended to listen to the exculpation which Bianco with much eloquence attempted.

She appeared to be satisfied with his account, but saw clearly enough the real state of the case, and inwardly resolved to take an opportunity of mortifying him while she gratified his rival. However, harmony seemed to be restored, and the whole party returned to Vincennes, more or less satisfied with the adventure of the day.

CHAPTER III.

A DEATH-BED.

" Il n'est Roy, Empereur, Duc, Conte,
Qui ne soit sujet à la mort,
Et qui ne faille rendre conte
De ce qu'il a fait droit ou tort." — *Martial de Paris.*

When Charles the Ninth entered the Château of Vincennes he was so much excited with feelings of gratified hate, finding as he did all his enemies in his power, that he boasted of his health being quite re-established, and talked of a thousand schemes for the future. His attached nurse, however, was of a different opinion, and saw with grief that he was daily wasting away: his flashes of spirit and animation were succeeded by fits of deep despondency; his dreams were feverish, and his waking fearful.

One day he would insist on hunting, and would exert his strength and energies to the utmost; the next he would be quite subdued, and unable to attend to business of any description. He loved the society of his sister Marguerite, but the name of his brother Henry seemed to give him a pang of agony. He trembled when his mother approached him, and avoided her as much as possible. At first, when his sister ventured to entreat his clemency for the two princes detained as prisoners in the château, he became so irritated that she feared to renew the subject. She wearied herself in devising schemes for their release, and as she was permitted to go and come at all times, and visit the captives without question, in consequence of the information she had before given of their intended evasion, she resolved to make an attempt to rescue them.

She was sometimes accompanied by one of her ladies, when she visited the royal prisoners, and the guard did not attempt to examine them nor make them take off their masks. La Torigni, her favourite lady, and she, therefore, thought it possible so to disguise one of the Princes, as that he might return with her dressed as a female.

When they entered the chamber in which they were confined together, she could not help being amused at their

occupation: they had several quails which they were flying from one end of the long corridor which led from their room to the other, and betting with great earnestness as to which would reach the extremity first.

"Alas!" said Marguerite, unable to repress a smile, "this is sorry amusement for two Princes like you, who should be chasing the stag in yonder forest."

"True, Marguerite," replied Anjou, "but we are obliged to be content with smaller game, you see, and I assure you it is very entertaining."

Henry sighed, and gazed mournfully from the window.

"I have a plan," said Marguerite, "which, if you instantly adopt, you may be soon in a condition to resume your old sports. Let one of you dress yourself in the mantle, robe, and mask of La Torigni, and come with me back to my coach; no one will question us, and you may thus be able to escape."

"How, Marguerite," said Henry, "would you expose yourself to such a risk for our sake?—it must not be."

He took her hand kindly—she trembled, and the tears started to her eyes.

"It must," she replied; "there is no danger for me; Charles will readily forgive my part in this; and for my mother, as I never have her grace, I can be no worse off. Lose no time, I entreat you—I name neither, but I implore that one of you prepare to follow me."

La Torigni had, in the meantime, taken off her veil, mantle, and mask.

"Go, Anjou," exclaimed Henry, "let it be you to tempt this venture."

"What! and leave you to meet the fate, perhaps, of La Mole and the rest," cried Anjou; "no, Henry, your life is of more consequence to the party than my own. Fly to La Rochelle—they are already prepared—myriads will flock to your standard, and I will find some other means of escape."

"There is no other, my dear friend," said Henry; "Marguerite's plan is the best, but delay may ruin us. Hasten you to England to your royal bride elect—she will assist you with men and money. I will trust again to

my wife for assistance, and we shall, perhaps, soon meet again."

"If it must be," returned Anjou, "give me your robe my pretty Torigni, and let me try how I shall play the demoiselle."

Laughing, in spite of their fears, the party prepared to array the Duke in his disguise. Henry's kind and grateful tone towards her, made the heart of Marguerite bound with hope and delight. "He will love me, after all," she said to herself, "and happy years may yet be in store for me."

Anjou was nearly equipped, and La Torigni was coquettishly teaching him how to bear himself, and receiving his instructions in return how to wear his cloak and shade her eyes with his bonnet and feather, when a step was heard in the outer chamber, the door was thrown open, and the Queen-mother and Madame de Sauves stood before them.

"You are merry maskers," said the Queen-mother in a contemptuous tone, "but we heard of your pastime and were anxious to join it. Will you suffer us to be of the party?"

Marguerite summoned all her presence of mind, and endeavoured to turn the whole business into a joke, which the Princes favoured as much as their vexation would allow. However annoyed the young Queen might be at the failure of her project, her distress was heightened by observing the effect produced upon her husband by the entrance of De Sauves. Henry turned red and pale by turns, and retiring with her into a recess of the window, commenced an animated conversation in an under tone, while the Queen-mother kept the Duke and herself employed in listening to her.

"Well, Marguerite," said she; "I admire your new carriage extremely. You have no idea, Anjou, how gay it is; the panels are covered with gold, and the enamelled flower border is exquisite round the portières. It is lined with yellow velvet, embroidered in silver in the most graceful Grecian pattern. But I desired it to be driven away, as I thought we would go together to the forest to see the hunting."

"As your Grace desires," said Marguerite, colouring; for she saw through the Queen's meaning.

"De Sauves will kindly amuse the Princes," she said, "till my return; and, Torigni, you can await us here—be as witty and gay as possible, that they may not regret our absence or the interruption of the masque."

So saying, they separated according to Catherine's arrangement, who did not deign to notice to her daughter the discovery she had made of the plan for the escape of one of her prisoners. Marguerite exerted herself to appear in her usual spirits; and, as there were several ladies in the Queen's coach, her confusion was, she hoped, unobserved by her mother. After a miserable drive through the forest she returned; and, being joined by La Torigni, hid herself in her own apartments dispirited and wretched.

Meantime the conversation which had taken place between Henry and the artful object of his admiration was far from conducing to the interests of Marguerite. De Sauves, who had by her spies obtained information of the part the Princess had taken from policy in preventing their former escape, represented her conduct in the worst light, and made it appear that her present friendly offer was a scheme to draw them into some imprudence, and make a merit with the King of betraying them, as she had done before.

Henry, though his amiable nature made it difficult to him to believe so much treachery existed in one whose good qualities he could not but have observed, was yet biassed by the arguments, and seduced by the affectionate interest shown by De Sauves, and resolved in future to be more guarded than ever, and to avoid all familiar intercourse with the unfortunate wife, who, he felt, was forced upon him in the first instance by a stratagem, the effects of which he could never reflect on without horror.

De Sauves continued to visit the Princes in their confinement, bringing with her several ladies recommended as suitable for their mutual purpose by the Queen-mother; keeping up lively and amusing scenes, which should distract the melancholy thoughts of the captives, and make them forget their plans for the good of their party. She

succeeded so well, that both Princes believed themselves chosen as her favourite, and by degrees jealous feelings crept between them and their former friendship; and, when alone, they seldom spoke together of their private affairs.

Marguerite, a few days after her futile attempt to release the Princes, was sitting in her chamber, full of mournful thoughts, when Mabille, the King's nurse, sent word to be allowed to enter. She came with tears in her eyes to tell the Princess that King Charles, who had passed a very bad night, desired her presence.

"He wishes, madam, to see you alone," said Mabille; "for he loves you much, and confides in you entirely, and would not have others by at your conference."

Marguerite started up, and, with agitated steps, followed the nurse by a private way to the chamber of the King. He had not risen; and she was shocked to observe the hollowness of his eyes, and the livid paleness of his cheeks. A ray of pleasure lighted up his countenance as she approached.

"Margot," he said, "I sent for you that I may speak confidentially to one who, alone of all my family, I know to be true. Your husband is a good man, — I know not how one with so good a heart could exist amongst us, for we are all bad; — even you cannot be perfect, Margot, for you are my mother's daughter. Anjou is weak and wavering: Henry, — he who is King of Poland, and waits impatiently to be King of France, — he is wicked, and will seek your ruin; tell Henry of Navarre to beware of him. I would fain," he added, his mind apparently wandering, "they escaped; my mother told me you tried to effect it — I would you had. They will not be safe here; I have been made to write — lies — lies — even to the last, and now Margot I am dying. *She* will soon come — kiss me — she will be a spy on me to the end. I hear her step. Retire: if she knows I sent for you she will suspect something. I am resolved to see Navarre; send, and let him insist on being admitted."

He pushed her from him hastily after having clasped her in his arms, and mingled his tears with hers, for he heard that the Queen-mother approached. Marguerite

returned as quickly as possible to her own apartments, and hurried from thence to those of her husband. She informed him of the request of Charles; and he, seeing her tears, endeavoured to comfort her, speaking, as was usual with him when uninfluenced by others, kindly and with tenderness. But the sound of his voice when he thus addressed her, while it revived all her fond devotion towards him, served but to render her after-moments more unhappy when she reflected that it was merely the kindness of his nature which inspired its tone, and not any love for her whom he addressed.

Henry detained her for a moment as she was about to leave him.

"Marguerite," said he, "I fear I have not sufficiently expressed my gratitude to you for the able defence with which you furnished me in this late sad trial where so many of my friends have perished. I have gained no little credit for my eloquence, which my judges knew not was borrowed; and but for your kind foresight I must have said something to criminate my companions."

"All my talents, such as they are," returned Marguerite, "I am too happy to dedicate to you; to serve you is my only wish — alas! would I were more successful! But Charles is in a mood to grant you much — he is, I fear, dying — if I lose him I have no support!"

Her tears flowed afresh. Henry overcome by her sorrow leant over her chair, and stooping down kissed her forehead. "Poor Marguerite!" — he said, in so tender a tone that her heart seemed to die away with emotion; she dared not look up, — she stirred not, but remained for some time without speech or motion. When at length she roused herself she found that Henry was gone, and she was alone in his chamber. She approached the table at which he had been sitting, took up one of the gloves he had worn and kissed it, lifted up the book he had been reading, and found this passage marked in the verses of Desportes: —

"L'honneur tant désiré n'est qu'une vision
Qui, troublant nos esprits par leur illusion,
Fait quitter l'heur présent pour follement chercher
Une ombre qu'on ne peut voir, sentir, ni toucher."

She replaced the book with a sigh. "Honour nevertheless will be no empty vision to him," said she; "he is full of noble qualities, and worthy of a better fate than to be caged here amongst enemies. Why does he not love me? He acknowledges my advice is useful to him, — he seeks my counsel, yet he flies my society, — he mistrusts and confides in me at the same time, — why is this?"

She was answered by her next glance towards the table, for there lay a small picture painted by du Moutier, one of the court painters, representing in all her fatal beauty and fascination the too successful De Sauves. "He *pities* me!" she exclaimed bitterly, and quitting the room, hurried back to her own apartment.

Meantime Henry had applied to be admitted to the sick chamber of the King, but the guard requested him to retire as the Queen-mother had given orders that he should not be disturbed, having just received the visit of the Bishop of Auxerre and the priest.

"Refuse me not," said Henry; "the King himself desires my presence, and I insist on entering."

He advanced, and knocked himself at the door, notwithstanding the opposition of the soldier.

The sick King, who was listening for his arrival, raised himself in his bed, and exclaimed —

"Mabille, — it is the King of Navarre; open the door instantly."

"Let no one be admitted," said Catherine peremptorily. "His Grace can ill bear clamour and interruption."

"Madam," said Charles, looking fiercely at her, "I say Henry of Navarre, my brother-in-law, shall enter. What *subject* have I who dares gainsay my will?"

Catherine was silent, but turned pale with rage as Mabille opened the door and Henry entered. He was struck with the scene before him. The Queen-mother was seated at the bed's head, on a coffer such as was the usual furniture of private rooms at that period. At a little distance was Anjou, and further off still at the foot of the bed, in an attitude of humility, and partially concealed by the heavy curtains, stood Elizabeth of Austria, the wife of Charles, her hands clasped in prayer, and with deep grief

on her countenance. Mabille supported the King in her arms; his face was ghastly, his night-dress spotted with blood, owing to the rupture of a bloodvessel which had taken place in the night; the same stains were on the bed-clothes; and as he sat erect, with his sunken eyes glaring between passion and pain, his teeth clenched, and his hollow cheeks of deadly whiteness, while his emaciated hands felt wanderingly about for some support, his appearance was horrible in the extreme.

He seemed to revive for a moment as Henry approached, but it was with difficulty he spoke as he grasped his hand convulsively.

"Forgive me, Henry," he said; "I fear I have followed evil counsels."

"With all my heart I forgive your Grace," said Henry; "can I in aught be serviceable to your wishes, command me I entreat."

Charles endeavoured to smile, pressed his hand, and tried to raise his finger to point towards his wife.

"I confide to you — to you, Henry, my wife and infant daughter. God will bless and keep you. But," he added, struggling for breath, "do not trust in ——"

"Hold! sire," interposed Catherine; "say not that!"

"I ought to say it," said Charles, sinking back, for it "is the truth." *

Catherine held to his nostrils an essence which she carried — he appeared to grow fainter — she desired that the Princess and the reigning Queen should leave the apartment, as he seemed inclined to sleep,—then rising, left him to the care of Mabille, and retired with the rest.

Many hours passed on into the night, and Mabille stirred not from his pillow; one pale hand lay on his breast, the other had fallen by his side; his head was buried in the cushion which supported it: he breathed hard, but moved not, till just as the heavy solemn sound of the bell of the Sainte Chapelle struck two he opened his eyes, glared wildly round, and uttered a shriek, so loud, so appalling, that the sentinels without started, and Mabille

* This scene is historical.

shuddered with horror. He raised himself up in his bed, and threw his arms frantically from side to side.

"Save me!" he cried in a piercing voice; "the spectres are bloody! — they nod at me! — they snatch at my heart! — they are there waiting to torment me! — the bell has sounded, — kill — kill!

With a violent effort he tried to leap from the couch; a stream of blood rushed from his lips and covered him with its tide, when falling suddenly backward on his pillow he expired.

At the same moment the chamber door opened, and gave entrance to the Queen-mother, the Cardinals of Bourbon and Ferrara, the Chancellor Birague, and other grandees of the Court who were in attendance in the ante-chamber. All surrounded his bed, and Mabille, who had fainted, was carried to her apartment by some of the attendants.

CHAPTER IV.

SIEGE OF DOMFRONT.

"Oh! what a noble combat last thou fought!" — *King John.*

The Rochellois, while they kept themselves on the alert, maintained, nevertheless, an appearance of peace. The breaches in their ramparts were repaired, their soldiers well disciplined, and they felt themselves strong in friends and money. The Count de Montgomery's supplies had reached them at a lucky moment, and his arrival at Jersey was heard of by them with great pleasure. As soon as he landed his forces he resolved to visit La Rochelle, and arrived there just at the time when the marriages of Belcastel and Claude were about to be solemnised. When the gallant conduct of these young volunteers was named to him, and when he recognised in them his former friends of Paris, he was extremely gratified, and desired to be present at the solemnity. It was from his hand that Claude received his beloved Alix; and the Count, who

was much affected during the ceremony, presented her with a ring of great value.

"I give you," he said, "this ring, because it is one of those jewels which I prize the most in the world. Claude I look upon as the preserver of my life, and I would fain feel that she whom he loves so well should possess something which shall be a tie in sympathy between us. This ring was given to me by my adored wife, whom I lost when the world and all its cares were new to me. That period was the beginning of the sorrows with which it has pleased Heaven to visit me. When you look on it, fair Alix, remember one who will always think on you both with a parent's affection. Would I could remain and witness your happiness! but my fate calls me away. I am summoned this very day, and my horse is at the church door to carry me to scenes of war and tumult once again."

He embraced the bride and bridegroom with friendly emotion, and took his leave. Not long after his departure from La Rochelle, Alix was regarding her ring with attention, and pointed out to Claude the peculiarity of its device, which was an altar, with the words "ARDO Y ADORO," and the letters "G. A." intertwined.

"This is strange!" said Claude, starting;—"the same motto and device are on the chain which I treasure as my only possession; and, what is more singular, it was through René Bianco, our foe, that I discovered the secret spring which conceals it. Look, Alix," said he, putting the chain into her hands,—"perhaps your ingenuity can find the secret; in vain have I attempted it; yet René, as with an accustomed hand, opened it in an instant."

They both examined the clasp with great care, but could not discover the method of unclosing it.

"Would that we were near dear Mabille!" said Alix. —"I have seen similar chains in her possession: her husband was a skilful jeweller, and she has often told me, was noted for his workmanship. She would probably be able to assist us. Mathurin is unfortunately gone to Alençon, or his knowledge might have availed us."

"There is a mysterious feeling," said Claude, musing,

—"which comes over my mind whenever I am brought into contact with the Count de Montgomery.—It has always seemed to me, when I have thought of him, as if there was some link which drew us together. Alas! I am unknown, even to myself;—an orphan, and a stranger to all who protected me. Why may I not, by some strange destiny, have been near him in infancy, and retain some recollection which time has not altogether effaced? It is, of course, only a curious coincidence about this device, yet it disturbs me strangely."

Little more was said on the subject at the time, but neither Alix nor Claude could banish it from their memory; and their speculations frequently recurred.

Meantime, the fate of the gallant Montgomery was drawing to a close. From town to town, along the line of country from Valogne to St. Lo, he had led his troops, joined by the flower of the Protestant party, and gained more or less success, till he entered the beautiful and difficult country of the Vaux, and paused at the little town of Domfront, in the château of which he hoped to be able to defend himself; but treachery had been at work amongst his army: the Queen-mother had made an oath in her own mind that, once again in France, Montgomery should be her victim. Neither troops nor money were spared; and a mighty army, under the direction of Marshal de Matignon, and many other experienced officers, was despatched to attack him. His Protestant friends at a distance saw his danger, and trembled for his safety: even in the ranks of the enemy were numerous concealed friends, employed by Henry of Navarre, to warn him to escape, assuring him that he was alone the object of pursuit.

Day after day, however, he grieved to find that his men deserted, and that bribery was effecting what force had failed to do. Hemmed in on all sides, he found his party was, at length, reduced to a few wounded, and not more than a hundred capable men. The town, although situated on an eminence, was commanded by other heights, where the enemy was now stationed, and could direct a fatal and unerring fire into the town, which was very ruinous, as were the walls of the antique castle itself; but the last was

the only hope which he retained, — trusting that, with a few determined followers, he should be able to defend it till assistance might arrive.

The cannon had battered the crumbling walls from sunrise till sunset of the preceding day, — immense breaches were effected in the town walls, and one enormous tower had given way. It was then that Montgomery resolved to retire into the castle with all who would follow him. Forty alone volunteered to support him, and amongst these were, unfortunately, some paid friends of Catherine. The assault upon the town was furious, and every hour the assailants poured in at the breaches. Montgomery and his small party, before they began their defence, knelt down and listened to the service performed by a minister of the Gospel.

The assailants were in number more than a thousand; nevertheless, for five hours the Count made good his defence on the first day, fighting at the breach with the most determined valour, while the ponderous masonry of his battered tower fell in heavy masses round him. Twice he was wounded in the face by fragments of the flying stones, a ball from an arquebuse struck him on the shoulder, but his armour was proof against it, though the bruise it caused was serious and painful.

With perseverance almost incredible, and with good fortune which promised a better result, he continued to sustain the unceasing assault for several days. The enemy's cannon, however, effected its purpose, and a second wide breach was made in the immense walls; still the brave few laboured to fill up the chasms, and kept them back; but on the morning of the twenty-sixth of May Montgomery discovered that his treacherous friends had deserted him by degrees, till he and fifteen others alone remained to contend with the hundreds without.

It was then that, overpowered by the entreaties of these few, seeing all chance gone, — their ammunition at an end and water failing them — dispirited at the base desertion of those in whom he trusted — Montgomery consented to a parley.

The most honourable terms were granted him; he was

to be permitted to march out fully accoutred, but with no arms save sword and dagger, and declare himself their prisoner,—so to be considered for a certain time, till his ransom was agreed on; but the most solemn assurances were given that his life should be in no danger.

His companions were also proclaimed free to march forth similarly accoutred, and to render themselves on the same terms.

Accordingly, Montgomery gave up himself and his men into the hands of De Matignon and De Vassay, who was a relation of the Count: and the victors entered the château by the breaches.

But scarcely had they entered, than the shrieks and cries within told how ill the compact had been kept: except a few whom they kept prisoners, for the sake of appearances, all the rest, sick and wounded, were put to the sword. One captain, who had shown great valour in the defence, they hung from the walls; and the excellent minister, whose prayers and exhortations had comforted and encouraged the unfortunate soldiers, the servants of Catherine butchered where they found him, on his knees in prayer.

It was, therefore, with little hope of safety that Montgomery took his way to Caen, under the escort of commanders who had so ill kept faith to his brave followers; and his feelings, as he entered the city so fatal to him, were those of horror and despondency. When he heard that Charles IX. had just breathed his last, and that Catherine de Medicis had caused herself to be proclaimed regent of the kingdom, in the absence of Henry, King of Poland, he knew that his last chance of liberty or life had departed for ever.

CHAPTER V.

THE TALISMAN.

"What! will the line stretch till the crack of doom?" — *Macbeth.*

The night after the death of King Charles, Catherine and Bianco conferred together in the Queen's tower in Paris.

"And now Madonna," said René Bianco, "you are sole Sovereign of France. There is none to control you, — your will is law, — and Montgomery was this morning brought prisoner from Caen to Paris."

"Oh, Bianco!" answered the Queen, "you are right; for the first time in my existence I feel that I am now free to act. I have despatched courier after courier to inform Henry of his brother's death, — that if one fails, another may reach him, — yet months must elapse before he can escape from the desolate region where a brother's hatred banished him. Meantime, Navarre is in my power, the charms of De Sauves still enchain him, and he will not strive to escape; jealousy has sprung between him and Anjou, — and thus their plans will fail. The Bastile holds the other dangerous rebels. But, above all, De Lorges is mine. The walls of the Conciergerie have received him, and he leaves them only for the scaffold. Now, René, my star is indeed in the ascendant."

"And this very night," said René, "the talisman is complete."

"Is it, indeed, possible?" exclaimed Catherine. "Oh, give it me, René, — let me feast my eyes on the precious treasure!"

Bianco approached the light which burned upon the table, and, drawing from his bosom a small box, gave it into her hands. She opened it with trembling haste, and beheld a medal covered with characters, which, with the deepest interest, she proceeded to examine.

It was of oval shape. On the side which presented itself to her view was represented a naked figure seated,

with long hair and beard, wearing a crown, and holding a sceptre in his right hand. The head and body of an eagle appeared between his knees, as if he were resting upon it. Before him stood a figure like the Egyptian Anubis, naked, with a dog's head, holding a large mirror towards the crowned figure, and supporting himself on a long spear with a barbed head. Round about were various hieroglyphical emblems, resembling architectural forms, and many mysterious signs environed both figures.

Between the two was written the word ANAEL, with a triangular sign, and the letter H beneath it. Below the line, on which the figures were placed, were the letters H. F., crowned with hieroglyphical signs, and the words AMIC and OXIF.

Catherine gazed long and fixedly on this, while René, in mysterious language, explained the meaning; he then took the medal from its case, and turned it on the other side.

At the top appeared the sign of the planet Venus, and beneath it the word HAGIEL over the head of a naked female figure, who, with arms outstretched, held some objects which resembled masonic instruments. Signs and hieroglyphics were profusely scattered over the surface. Between a double cross and mysterious letter were the five small circles or balls, representing the arms of the house of Medici. Beside the left knee of the figure was the word HANIEL; and below her feet EBVLEB: beneath which appeared ASMODEL, with the sign of the balance.

"While you wear this," said René solemnly, "you will reign supreme.* It is a great mystery, and must be a profound secret to every living creature."

"It shall," said the awe-struck Queen, receiving it from him, and hanging it round her neck by a silver chain to which it was attached.

"Observe!" said René, "you will reign supreme; I say not for how long, nor do I guarantee that crosses will not come to thwart you,—the influences of other stars may

* This description is exact, of a talisman in the possession of the Queen-mother.

fight against you; and, though you will surmount them, they will cause you trouble."

"But I shall surmount them?" asked the Queen eagerly.

"You will," replied the Italian. "But for one human affection that clings about your heart, you were sole arbitress of your own fate. You cannot but guess what I mean."

"I know not, René," said Catherine; "explain what weakness stands in my way."

"You have still two sons," replied René; then, lowering his voice, he added, "you must have *none* before the great work can be accomplished."

Catherine shuddered. "We will talk," she said, "of this hereafter. Would that I knew if Anjou would wed the Queen of England! Would that I knew the fate of Henry of Navarre! Cannot we consult the mirror to-night? Are not the stars propitious to our questions?"

"They are, Madonna," replied René. "If you will, this hour shall present the secrets of futurity before you."

"Be it so!" said Catherine.

The work of incantation, which was so often carried on in that mysterious chamber, was again resumed. A gloomy shadow crept by degrees along the floor, and rose in strange forms to the roof; the light became extinct; and a lurid ray spread itself over the surface of the mirror opposite the Queen.

A phantom shape* suddenly appeared in the glass,—it was crowned, and wore the features of the King of Poland. Fifteen times the shape returned to the delighted eyes of Catherine. The last time something dimly apparent flashed across it, which shone in her eyes like the glitter of steel; but she could not define its exact meaning.

Another figure then rose, but it appeared older than a son of Henry's might seem; and, as she strained her eyes to catch the lineaments, she recognised those of the Duke de Guise; but scarcely was she aware of it, when it had disappeared, and a clash of arms accompanied its sudden exit from the scene.

* The whole of these particulars are historical, related by the chroniclers of the time.

Next advanced a form which, with feelings of rage and hatred, she perceived bore the traits of Henry of Navarre: she could scarcely restrain an exclamation of impatience; but René hastily caught her arm, and signed to her to be silent.

Twenty-two circuits the figure made, and then faded with a flash similar to that which had been seen at her son Henry's departure;—a long line of crowned forms, with the arms of Bourbon gleaming above them, ran rapidly along the glass; but Catherine closed her eyes, to see no more.

A female figure throned, with ships and cannon, and hosts of shadowy guards, and piles of gold, was then seen. At first, the features were those of Elizabeth of England, in her youth; but, as she still remained seated, a change, appeared, wrinkles marked her brow, and fresh navies and new armies seemed passing and repassing around, before and behind her. A scaffold grew distinct, and a female form was led to it; but Catherine could scarcely credit her sight, which told her the victim wore the crown of France, and had the mien of Mary of Scotland.

This faded, and the queenly phantom grew older and more aged in her sight, till she had reached decrepitude: but ever her state, and wealth, and power seemed to increase, till the mirror was crowded with indistinct moving shadows. No partner shared her throne; and the sign of Virgo hovered to the last above her head. At length she disappeared, and all was darkness.

Catherine cast herself into a seat; and René proceeded to destroy the charm by sundry cabalistic formulæ: the cloud dispersed, and the chamber resumed its former appearance, while the lights sprang forth again and illumined the whole space.

"Now, Bianco," said the Queen, "ask me for what you will, that I may show my gratitude by granting it."

"First, Madonna, I must have gold," replied René, "and a large sum: but I have set my mind on something which you will consider rather strange, perhaps, for one like me;—the Abbey of St. Mahé, in Brittany, is a rich one, and may be purchased: you must give that to me, and see how good an abbot I shall become. Not that I

mean to abandon you or the Court, Madonna," added he, smilingly; "it is but for the sake of the revenue; and also," he continued, crossing himself, "to do service to mother church."

"Bianco," said Catherine, with a perturbed countenance, "you have asked that which is no longer in my power to give. I have already rewarded a faithful servant with that Abbey — you must think of some other."

The brow of René lowered, and one of those malignant glances shot from his eyes which were familiar to their expression, but he said nothing.

"Is not that of Bourgueil in Anjou vacant?" asked the Queen.

"Bailly, the President of Accounts, bought it but lately," replied René, with a sneer; "has your Grace forgotten it?"

"Oh, true!" answered his mistress; "the father of your runaway bride. Why René do you not visit him, and induce him to make you his heir? The President is rich; and since you would fain have church possessions, why not those? There has been some cavilling of late about these appointments to laymen, and I care not to give the severe preachers and the Huguenots a handle for abuse. But think not you shall go ungratified: the country-house and estate of La Mole shall be yours; it is forfeited for his treason, and there is no reason why a dear friend of mine, whose taste is equal to the former possessor's, should not enjoy it."

Bianco expressed his thanks, and was, to a certain degree, gratified by the donation; but the first refusal rankled in his heart, and he resolved to discover to whom the coveted Abbey had been granted.

The truth was that, as a compensation for all the terror he had lately suffered, and as an inducement to him to relinquish the vengeance he had sworn against René, Catherine had presented that valuable possession to no other than Cosmo Ruggieri, his rival, who, in return, had but just furnished her with a painted talisman of virgin parchment, formed, as was said, of the skin of an infant that had died in its birth, which was considered a potent

charm against poison and the evil eye; the influence of both of which, in spite of her apparent confidence, she dreaded might one day be extended against her by her useful but dangerous friend, René Bianco.

She had despatched Cosmo to take possession of his Abbey, thinking it better that the rivals should not be together at this moment. She was anxious that René should absent himself shortly, as the other was expected back, and was glad of the thought which had suggested itself of his visiting Bailly — a hint he was not slow to take, as he built on it some plans which time matured in due course.

Catherine lost no time in taking every precaution to insure the establishment of her power, and to guard against any attempt which might touch her interest or safety. She caused all the doors and entries of the Louvre to be walled up, leaving no other open than the great door which looked towards the Hôtel de Bourbon. Of this even the wicket was alone unclosed; behind it was stationed a guard of archers, and without a Swiss corps de garde. The two extremities of the Rue du Louvre were also walled up, leaving a small entry in each strongly guarded, so that no one could approach the château without permission.

She had previously been waited upon at Vincennes by all the dignitaries of Paris, to entreat her to fulfil the expressed desire of the late King, and accept the regency of the kingdom during the absence of her son the King of Poland.

She had, without the loss of a moment's time, despatched letters of a mild tendency to all the governors of every province in France.

To the Prince of Condé she also sent letters exhorting him to peace and good-will.

She obliged the Duke of Anjou and the King of Navarre to send similar missives to all the governors of provinces, confirming what she had said. All her words bespoke peace and anxiety for the good of the state and the forgetfulness of injuries, even while her actions were of the boldest, fiercest, and most malignant character.

With haste that admitted of no delay she insisted on the trial of Montgomery being commenced, and exulted in the total impossibility of his again escaping her vengeance.

On arriving in Paris from Caen, where he had been at first carried, the unfortunate Count de Montgomery found that his destination was to the prison of the Conciergerie. To know this, and to feel that his last chance of life was over, were the same.

He passed through the vast court called the Préau, where prisoners were accustomed to take all the exercise allowed them, and was conducted through the obscure corridor which led to the prison allotted him. This frightful dark passage, of great length, seemed to shut out every ray of hope, and lead forward only to despair and death. The usual fee, called La Pistole, was demanded of him, and, with a step as firm as he could assume, the betrayed warrior advanced to the tower which still retains his name, existing at the present day as the Tour de Montgomeri.

Here he took possession of the gloomy chamber which the vengeance of Catherine had decreed should be his last abode, and here he waited till the leisure of his vindictive enemy should have allowed her to summon the tribunal at whose hands he felt sure he could expect no mercy.

He thought of his nine children, whose mother he had married in accordance with the wishes of his family, but who had not replaced his Agnes in his affection; and after so many years, he shed tears of tender memory over his first and only love, and over the unknown fate of his infant son.

His first request was that he might be allowed to receive a visit from Mabille, which was accorded him with more readiness than he expected, and the nurse of the late King was accordingly introduced into his prison.

"Alas! Mabille," said he, taking her hand, "our meetings have always been on sad occasions, and this I doubt not will be the last. I am given over to a powerful enemy, and I cannot hope to escape. There will be no one to hear or attend to my last request; the son of my

beloved friend Anthony of Navarre is captive like myself, and cannot aid me. I have little property to leave, — none in France, for all was confiscated here many years since. My children will inherit their mother's wealth, which is considerable; but I had made provision, a fanciful one, you will think, since there was so little hope of my ever recovering him, — for my eldest born; and an estate in Scotland, which was almost all that was left me, has been set apart for him should he ever be found. The revenues of that estate are not trifling, and I would fain leave them to a young man who saved my life, and to whom I am strangely attached. I have drawn up this paper which I confide to you, and I request that should I be condemned, of which there can be no doubt, you will see that it reaches Claude Emars at La Rochelle."

The nurse uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Is it then Claude who saved you?" exclaimed she.

"Yes," replied the Count, who proceeded to relate all the different situations under which he had met him, and went on further to inform her of his late marriage with Alix. Mabille listened with tears of joy, and inwardly resolved as soon as possible to execute the plan she had formed of visiting the beloved pair in the Protestant town where she might probably end her days in their society.

"Know you aught," said Montgomery, "of the fortunes of that young man? A strange resemblance has struck me in the expression of his countenance which I cannot forget. But, if it really existed, you, Mabille, who knew her well, would have been aware of it. Is there not something of my lost Agnes about him?"

"The first time I beheld him," returned the nurse, "the likeness you mention appeared to me forcible, but as he grew older it seemed to have faded away. I know no more of his life than what was communicated to me by Jeanne of Navarre, when she desired me to receive him on his coming to Paris to study. I understood him to be the orphan child of one of the retainers of the House of Navarre, and he never spoke to me of his birth beyond occasionally lamenting, when he first became acquainted with Alix, his insignificance and want of fortune."

"He is worthy of a higher destiny, and his valour and good conduct may lead him to it," said Montgomery with a sigh. "Adieu, dear Mabille," he continued, "let me entreat you to take these letters; and, when an occasion offers for them to be safely transmitted, try to have them sent to my children in England. Conceal them, lest harm should reach you by thus serving one who has no other friend."

"Fear not for me," said Mabille, firmly, "the superstition of Catherine will prevent her injuring me: the King in his last illness used an expression which has sunk deep into her mind. 'My curse,' he said, 'on any who would offer harm to my nurse Mabille. Mother, I charge you, see her provided for; I have no care for any beside.' Catherine immediately settled a pension on me, and leaves me free to go where I please. I trust there is yet hope for you. Your friends are powerful. I will instantly seek La Rochelle, and consult with those who may be better able to assist you. I am not, thank God, feeble or unable to exert myself in spite of age, and by his blessing you may yet be restored to liberty."

They accordingly parted. The Count was left in his dismal prison, and the faithful nurse prepared to set out as quickly as possible on her long journey, inspired with hope which was not destined to be fulfilled.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EXECUTION.

"La coupable ici-bas condamna l'innocent." — MEZERAYE.

MABILLE, on returning to her residence in Paris, for she had now quitted her former apartments in the palace, was surprised to find that a stranger awaited her. When she heard that this stranger was a priest, her alarm was excited, and she entered her chamber, where stood the unexpected visitor, in much perturbation. As soon as she came

in he uttered an exclamation, and, hastening past her, closed the door, then turning round addressed her in a tone which she did not recognise.

"Sister," said he, "think you we have met before?"

Mabille answered in the negative.

"Then," replied the priest, "my disguise is complete, and I may venture on my mission safely."

"Claude!" exclaimed the nurse, throwing herself into his extended arms, "is it indeed you? Why are you here, in the midst of danger? I thought you safe at La Rochelle, and my purpose was to seek you there."

"Alix is safe there with our friends," replied Claude; but I am deputed from the good town to find out if there is any possibility of rendering service to the Count de Montgomery, who, we heard, was taken at Domfront, and since removed to Paris. I entreated to be the agent in this business, and, as I am little known and bear no name of note, I was deemed a fitting person for the attempt."

"Alas!" replied Mabille, "I fear little can be done; the Count is a prisoner in the Conciergerie!"

"What!" cried Claude; "have they then kept no faith with him?"

"The Queen-mother is his deadly foe," returned Mabille; "when did she show mercy to any? — and least of all will she to him. His trial is to come on immediately, and the result of it I tremble to contemplate."

"Surely, they dare not ——" Claude paused, afraid to end the sentence he had begun.

"The Queen-mother is all-powerful now," said Mabille. "I fear the worst; and see no means of saving the unfortunate Count, although, but now, I tried to give him hope."

"You have then seen him?" asked Claude, eagerly.

Mabille related their late conversation, and the possibility of her being again admitted to an interview. She told Claude of the generous arrangement the Count had made respecting him, which he heard with tears of gratitude. She even named to him the imagined likeness which Montgomery had discovered; and, on the inquiries of Claude, related the sad history of his early marriage, and the loss of his

son to whom she was nurse. From this she reverted to her own loss in her husband's disappearance, which Claude had already heard from Alix.

"And you have never from that time," asked Claude, sadly, "heard tidings of your husband, nor the child of Montgomery? Was there no clue by which it would be possible to trace their fate?"

"Alas!" said Mabille, — "that he disappeared is all I know. Where he met his fate I never learnt, nor can imagine. He had merchandise with him, and was probably pillaged of that at the same time his life was taken. The infant was poorly clad, that he might seem the son of a mere tradesman. I dressed the smiling creature for that fatal journey, and wound round his neck the chain I had taken from his dead mother's neck."

"Mabille!" cried Claude, with an involuntary start of amazement, — "what do you say? Had Montgomery's child a chain of hair round its neck?"

"Yes," said the nurse; — "a chain made by my husband, who was the most skilful workman of his day. It was of the most delicate texture, but as strong as iron: the links were formed like true love-knots, and it was clasped with a gold heart, in which was a secret spring."

"Was it like this?" exclaimed Claude, drawing from his bosom the chain he wore.

Mabille seized it eagerly, ran it rapidly through her fingers, examined it with trembling minuteness, and pressing the clasp with her nail, it sprang open and disclosed the device beneath.

"This is the chain itself!" cried she. "Oh, Claude! — for the love of mercy tell me how you came by it? — Was it a spoil taken in fight? — Where — how? — Explain!"

"Oh! my dear friend," answered Claude, — "how shall I answer calmly a question which involves the history of my life? That chain was on my neck when I was found an infant, stabbed by the same banditti who had murdered my father. Anthony of Navarre discovered me and my dead parent. He adopted and brought me up, and this is all I ever knew of my birth! 'Tis strange that

René Bianco alone discovered to me the secret spring which disclosed this device, which I have since striven in vain to find and open."

"René!" cried the nurse, "then it must be so! — No one could open this but he who made it, or one taught the secret. — It was one of the marvels of my husband's art; — René Bianco was a boy in his service at the time this chain was made, — the first he ever completed; and as small fingers were required, his were employed in weaving it, and to him the spring was known. He was then called Florio; but I have long suspected he and our runaway apprentice, the son of the villain whom the Queen-mother favoured, were the same."

Claude then went on to relate every circumstance he ever remembered to have heard respecting his being found by Anthony of Navarre; and as his narrative advanced he became, as well as the nurse, more and more convinced that René and his father must have been the murderers of the unfortunate merchant, the husband of Mabille; and that he himself could be no other than the son of Montgomery. The account, as he had heard it, was as follows: —

Soon after the death of Henry II., occasioned by the unfortunate accident in the fatal tournament, where the Count de Montgomery's spear pierced his eyebrow, Anthony of Navarre was journeying to Paris, where his arrival had been too long delayed; his friends justly blaming his inactivity in allowing his interests to sleep, while his enemies were at work to injure them. He had not travelled very far beyond the mountainous regions of his territory, when, at the close of day, his party entered a thick wood, and were attracted by cries to a spot, as they approached which, they witnessed an unequal conflict between a man of middle age, who had the appearance of a merchant, and a party of banditti. Several had surrounded him, and with blows and menaces were endeavouring to wrest from him the property he carried at his saddle-bow. He appeared to have been defending himself with great resolution; but the recent arbitrary order that no person of the Protestant persuasion should carry arms, gave his adversaries great advantage over him, and told the followers of the king that

they beheld one of their own religion in danger. They spurred their horses, but before they could come up with the ruffians, they had succeeded in dragging the unfortunate traveller to the ground. He had struck down his foremost assailant, when a youth of about fifteen darted suddenly from the bushes near, and stabbed him with a dagger in the back. The traveller fell instantly, and as he did so the sharp cry of an infant was heard, and from his nerveless arms dropped a little child, whom one of the robbers, with a savage laugh and violent gesture, tossed to the other side of the path. The young miscreant, who had killed the unhappy merchant, sprang towards it and struck the child, but at the same moment he was felled by a well-directed blow from Anthony of Navarre's hand, and a general scuffle ensued, in the midst of which one of the robbers mounted the horse of the fallen man, and made off with his booty: the rest, after receiving some severe wounds from the rescuing party, contrived to escape, leaving several of their companions killed, and their victims beside them.

The traveller was quite dead, but it was discovered that the infant was only slightly hurt, although the young assassin had inflicted a broad gash on one side of its forehead. All that could be done was resorted to, to restore animation in the poor man, but in vain. His body was, therefore, conveyed to the château, where the king proposed to pass the night; and the crying infant was consigned to the care of a female attendant.

Shocked at the scene which he had witnessed, Anthony, whose kindness of heart was proverbial, immediately took an interest in the deserted being whose father — for such he imagined the merchant to be — had been murdered; and he gave directions that when the child was quite recovered, it should be sent under an escort to Pau, and given in charge to Queen Joanna, to whom he wrote the particulars of the event.

The property of the traveller having become the prey of the banditti, no clue was left to guide him in his conjectures as to who the person might be who had met with such an untimely end. The child's dress was such as

might be worn by one of middle rank, and the only thing noticeable in its attire, was that round the little neck was wrapped several times a chain of dark hair with gold chased clasps of singular and very elaborate workmanship.

"I am that child!" said Claude, "and your unfortunate husband, dear Mabille, must be he whom I have always mourned as a father!"

"Alas!" cried Mabille, "the troubles of the times prevented my ever meeting Anthony of Navarre when he arrived at Paris, or long years of suspense might have been spared me, and the Count de Montgomery have ceased the search which he has never abandoned for his lost child. But I see the hand of Providence is in this," continued the nurse, "for your unfortunate father had destined you to the care of the very Prince who unknowingly adopted you. My poor husband would have willingly given himself up a sacrifice could he have known it, but the ways of Heaven are inscrutable. Kneel with me, my child, and thank God, who has, by a miraculous interposition, brought you to the knowledge of a father at a time when his days are numbered. I entreat you to cherish no vain hope, but to be resigned to all that may be decreed for both to endure."

"Oh, Mabille!" said Claude with tears of agony, "it is so hard to behold a glimpse of happiness, and to have the cup dashed from our lips when the draught is sweetest!"

"Such is the lot of humanity, my son," replied the nurse, solemnly, "we must submit,—not murmur."

Fervent were the prayers both breathed on that sad occasion, and, their orisons ended, they rose from their knees with hearts more able to bear the trials which awaited them.

It was agreed that Mabille should once more attempt to visit the Count; and that Claude, in his character of a priest, should endeavour to introduce himself into the prison. Early the next day, therefore, they set out with this intention; and, having arrived at the Conciergerie, they mingled with the crowd without, which was as usual gathered round the building, anxious to learn how the trial, which had already commenced, proceeded.

There was much excitement amongst the people, and their observations and sarcasms were by no means few or guarded. Although Charles the Ninth had never been popular, even amongst those of his party, yet the sinister reports respecting his death gave him an interest in their minds which they had not felt before. The King of Poland was known to be proud and vindictive, and his character, which promised well in early life, had been long changing for the worse: he had surrounded himself with favourites, and histories were told of his vices, which were little calculated to endear him to the people, whose affections were directed towards his brother Francis Duke of Anjou, and whom they would willingly have hailed as king in his stead. Of Henry of Navarre none but the Huguenot party thought, and their strength was yet in its infancy; besides, he was apparently a resigned captive, and some doubts were entertained, both of his capacity and his spirit. The Duke de Guise was the general favourite of the people above all; his popular manners, generosity, splendour, and valour made him their hero, and his partisans were infinitely the most numerous amongst the divided Parisians. Throughout the whole mass, however, of the people there reigned one unanimous feeling, which was that of hatred, contempt, and fear of the Queen-mother.

As her coach was seen approaching the court of the prison, where she was coming for the purpose of hearing in person the trial of her intended victim, murmuring and muttered execrations rose around her; and, in spite of the number of guards who surrounded her, the voice of popular discontent and animosity reached her ears.

"Did René make the sauce for the pike?" exclaimed some, alluding to the report that the King had been poisoned by eating of this fish.

"Who told the King of Poland he should not be long away?" cried others, — for it had transpired that such were the parting words of the mother to her favourite son.

"How came he to live beyond April? Was the poison not strong enough?" was the question of many who had heard that the physicians employed had given this opinion.

"No Italian poisoners — no strangers!"

"Va, Fredigonde!" — "A bas Brunehaut!" — "Va-t'en, Jesabel!" — "Sorcière!" — "Maudite femme de Sathan!" were the greetings which resounded on all sides; and through these the imperious Queen made her way to the Council-hall, where sat the judges deliberating on Montgomery's fate.

When the Count was brought in, so great was the joy felt by Catherine to behold him in her power, and in the pitiable state in which he appeared, having just undergone the torture, that all the reviling of the mob seemed but as music passed away which heralded the pleasure of this this meeting. The brave prisoner of war, who had been the hero of so many fights, in all of which he had gloriously distinguished himself, — whose involuntary crime all noble minds had long ago forgiven, — against whom no rancour was felt by any party, — who was cited throughout Europe as the brightest ornament to the military glory of France, — once the handsomest, most accomplished, most beloved and admired cavalier of his age, — was dragged into court writhing with agony, his limbs dislocated, his features distorted, to hear the unjust sentence of treason passed upon him, and to exhibit his sufferings to the hateful tyrant who rejoiced in every pang he endured.

He was accused of having, in concert with the Duke of Anjou and the King of Navarre, plotted against the state; and, on his refusing to implicate any of his friends, he was condemned once more to undergo the *grande et petite gehenne*, as the torture was termed, which Catherine sat to see with glassy eye and lip blanched, not with horror, but with gratified hate, and finally he was sent back to his cell, having heard his sentence of death pronounced by his iniquitous judges, the slaves of their vindictive mistress.

Amidst the hootings of the mob the Queen returned to her palace: and with agonised hearts Mabille and Claude, who had heard the fatal sentence, applied for leave to see the prisoner. Now that his fate was decreed there was no objection made by the jailor, who asked no questions of Mabille, and permitted her and the supposed priest to enter the condemned dungeon for a brief space, and they

were informed for the last time, as the sentence would be carried into execution with as little delay as possible.

There, in a low damp cell, dark and loathsome, — where a faint light was admitted only through triple bars from a window, — whose walls were twelve feet in thickness, on wet straw, lay the gallant Montgomery, and in that miserable condition he heard a tale which had power to render his dungeon a palace-chamber filled with pomp and splendour. There he pressed to his heart the son of his adored Agnes, and confirmed to him a name which no tyranny could blemish. With the point of the dagger of Claude, on a slate which was found in his cell did Montgomery trace a few lines which acknowledged the discovery of his son at his last moments, and addressing it to Henry of Navarre, the Prince of Condé, and Elizabeth Queen of England, he signed his name for the last time.

This singular document he bade Claude preserve, as it would be all that could prove his birth, beside the testimony of Mabille. He charged him, however, to reveal the secret only to the heads of his party, for the present, lest he should create enemies who might injure the cause by working evil on him.

Short was the interview between the father and son, but in those few moments a life of happiness seemed to fleet away. Blessings and prayers were poured by each upon the other; and with grateful feelings of resignation on the part of the Count, and agonised regret on that of Claude, they were obliged to tear themselves from an embrace which they would fain have prolonged.

Claude led away the weeping Mabille, who by no tears or entreaties could prevail on his jailors to allow her to remain and attend on the unfortunate prisoner; and sadly did they return to her dwelling, to spend the night in prayer and lamentation.

Montgomery's closing scene was most edifying. He was taken to the scaffold, erected on the Place de Grève, in an open cart, his hands bound behind him, like the lowest criminal, accompanied by a Cordelier and the headsman.

He spoke firmly to the people, and declared himself

innocent of any of the crimes laid to his charge; professed his religion, for which he was happy to die; proclaimed the treachery of his enemies, who had taken him in fair fight, and had obtained his submission under promise of free pardon.

He refused to confess himself to the Bishop of Narbonne, who was in attendance; nor would he kiss the cross presented to him, nor listen to the priest who remained close to his side. This Cordelier addressed him with arguments intended to prove his religion one of error, and would have persuaded him that he had been deceived in adopting it. He looked at him firmly, and replied,—

"If I have been deceived, it was by one of your order: for it was such a one who first gave me a Bible in French, and who taught me to read it. And to that Cordelier I owe the knowledge of the religion I profess, which I hold to be the only true one; and having lived therein, I trust in God in that faith I shall die this day." *

These were Montgomery's last words; then, kneeling down, he prayed fervently for a few moments before he laid his head upon the block, and, the fatal axe descending, all his misfortunes were ended at a blow. Then followed the butchery common at the period; which, detailed with all its particulars to Catherine, caused her to laugh savagely and exclaim, — "Now I have, indeed, crushed the adder that stung me!"

CHAPTER VII.

BOURGUEIL.

"There are more ways than one of sacrificing to the fallen angels."
ST. AUGUSTINE.

THE Abbey of Bourgueil, on the confines of Anjou, was situated in a wooded country of great seclusion; it seemed as if the good monks who had there fixed their abode had resolved that no worldly foot should intrude on their pre-

* Historical.

cincts, so distant were they from the haunts of men, and so shut in by their forests from communion with their kind. Their rule was easy, and seldom was inquiry made as to their interior arrangements; from year to year the same set of brothers performed the same routine of duties, and enjoyed the same indulgences. A flourishing village grew around them, and their abbot always found his revenues regularly paid. As he was frequently a nobleman of the Court, he never interfered with church affairs; his abode, the abbot's house was always ready for him, but some years had passed since any superior had claimed the right of occupying it.

When the President Bailly, after the loss of his daughter, sought repose from the stirring scenes of which he had been an involuntary witness, he retired to this secluded spot, and finding its gloom and solitude suit the temper of his mind, he resolved there to spend the remainder of his life. He had made vain endeavours to discover the fate of Alix, and at length had come to the sad conclusion that, her profession of faith having been discovered, her life had fallen a sacrifice to her imprudent avowal of the truth. Naturally gloomy, the disappointment of his only hope in life had deepened the severity of his character, and added another shade to his sadness; amidst the thick shadows of the antique trees which surrounded his monastic abode he delighted to sit for hours, brooding over his sorrows, and indulging in them.

All the energy which his former occupations had called into action had faded away: his fondness for wealth and power, now that he had attained both, seemed suddenly to have evaporated, and he became a lonely, musing, melancholy man.

His religious duties were his only employment; and to listen to the monotonous chant of the monks as they went through their mechanical labours, to hear the sermon of the priest, which never by its energy disturbed the tranquillity of the scene around, and was addressed to the simple villagers, and suited to their narrow capacities, was all the excitement his mind required. The good monks looked upon him almost as a saint, and paid him much reverence and respect, while by the peasants he was re-

garded with awe and some degree of suspicion: he never mingled with them; his establishment was frugal, and his attendants few. One old servant, who had lived with him before the birth of Alix, he still retained; but most of the others were new. Marcel, who was much attached to his young mistress, felt great sorrow at her sudden loss; but as the President was uncommunicative and sullen, he had never been able to obtain the slightest clue to her fate. He knew well that a mystery hung over her; he had remarked her solitary tears, had noted the secret visits of the nurse, and, with the quick-sightedness of his class, had observed the evident attachment which had arisen between her and Claude. Left thus in total seclusion, the active mind of Marcel was wearied with the monotony of their present life, and he longed for the bustle and amusement of Paris, to which he had been always accustomed. The villagers hailed his presence in their cottages, and his ready jest and gay demeanour contrasted agreeably with his master's morose and haughty manner. He could not resist occasionally hinting at the events which had taken place in the President's family, and allowed himself sometimes to express his regret and surmises respecting Alix. A word is sufficient with the ignorant to create a wonder, and the love of the marvellous was a foible amongst the good people of the little town of Bourgueil, not uncommon in places where subjects for gossip are difficult to be met with. It was currently reported, therefore, that the President Bailly was a magician; that his daughter, having been required by the evil spirit whom he served, as a sacrifice, he had been obliged to yield her up, by which means he had saved his soul, and by future penitence and prayer he hoped to redeem his former sins.

This accounted for his sadness and his piety most satisfactorily, and the mystery which Marcel could not attempt to explain respecting Alix gave every colour to so natural a conclusion.

This and similar relations were heard with fear and trembling by the groups, who, seated beneath the village trees, listened frequently to such accounts, firmly believing every syllable; indeed they considered that so many extraordinary events had happened in their own

neighbourhood, notwithstanding the exertions of the holy brotherhood, that they could believe any thing of so wicked a place as the capital.

For instance, at a very short distance from Bourgueil, on the road to Tours, — which was also known to be a dangerous abode, only preserved from utter destruction by the prayers of the monks of Marmontier, — there was a barren moor, on which malefactors were sometimes hung in chains. It was recorded that a party of villagers once returning from the market at Bourgueil to Benest, a village a few leagues off, had in the dusk of evening occasion to pass across this moor; some of them had been drinking pretty freely, and as they were singing and talking loudly to keep up their spirits in this dismal spot, one amongst them, who was a great boaster, bragged that he would invite the dead man who hung upon the gibbet to join their party. Accordingly he called out in a lusty voice, "Comrade, — gueux de larron! — do you hear? — come down from your tree and have a dance with your betters, in the name of the blessed St. Polycarp!"

Scarcely had he uttered this impious exhortation, than a clankling of chains was heard, and a hollow voice answered from the gibbet, "Oui, oui, — hau! hau! je viens, attendez-moi!" and descending from the black and menacing elevation where he had swung, down came the corpse and pursued the affrighted villagers, who at the first clank of his chain had taken to their heels; the ghastly figure of the dead thief followed them with loud cries and peals of fiendish laughter, till they reached the cross of Benest, and there it vanished, while they all hurried to their homes, half dead with terror and remorse, and it required many masses to be said by the holy brothers of the abbey before the evil spirit was laid. Whenever any untoward event is about to happen in the bourg, some traveller is sure to be pursued by this "Larron pendu," till within sight of the abbey walls. A saying was rife throughout Tourraine, which confirmed the truth of this account: —

> "Vignerons, pendus à Bourgueil,
> N'ont besoin de fust ni cercueil."

The story had been explained at the time by a black-

smith of Benest, who stated that he had set out an hour or two earlier on that eventful night on his way home, but being rather sleepy, or, it may be, somewhat overcome by the last generous glass he had indulged in, he laid himself down to repose on the moor, not aware of his proximity to the gallows and its denizen. That he was awakened by the cries of his companions, had started up, gathered his tools together as quickly as possible — for they had fallen from his basket, — and in so doing made a great clashing of iron; hearing the hallooing, and finding where he was, and that the wind waved the dead body to and fro, he was seized with a panic, and ran after his friends, calling on them to stop with all his might.

This was considered an invention of the Evil One; the blacksmith was ever after looked upon with an eye of suspicion, and the legend of the "Larron pendu" was believed with pious integrity from that time.

One night a vigneron entered the bourg in great trepidation, having been, as he described, pursued to the very walls by this spectre, who had as usual disappeared at the convent gates; he related that, this time, it had appeared on horseback, and rode so furiously that, though he exerted all his speed and took the shortest cut across the meadows, he could scarcely escape being overtaken. Consternation spread through the little town, and something fearfully extraordinary was expected to happen before long. Nothing of moment, however, took place, except the announcement of an arrival at the abbot's house of a visitor; how he came, no one could say, — for he had not rested at the town nor been seen by any one, and the upper road to the house by the meadows was never attempted by travellers in consequence of the swamps and the danger apprehended from evil spirits. However, this visitor could have come no other way, and he must be either something supernatural or be well acquainted with the country. Marcel was soon surrounded, and inundated with questions as to his business and the manner of his arrival.

"With respect to his coming," said Marcel, "he rode from Tours, and had much difficulty in finding this out-of-the-way place."

"What! — difficulty in finding the abbey of the blessed St. Polycarp? He must be a strange man not to know where that is!" exclaimed several.

"Well, he found no one to ask, for leagues, he says," continued Marcel; "and, at last, as he was crossing the great moor hard by, he espied a man asleep on the ground, whom he roused, and having called to him, instead of telling him the way, he began running with all his might and roaring for help; he rode as fast as he could after him, and only stopped at the abbey gates, — having found a guide without knowing it."

Significant glances were exchanged by the peasants, who clearly saw that all could not be right in this instance, and to whom the fallacy of the story was evident, as they had previously heard Jean le vigneron's account, and knew what to trust to. However, no remarks were made, and the circumstances of the stranger's arrival were not commented on openly; when, however, he was seen constantly to accompany the President to church, and exhibited signs of extreme devotion, it was surmised that he must be in some way or other connected with the former deeds of the lay abbot.

In this they were not mistaken, — for this visitor was no other than René Bianco.

The subtle Italian had resolved to follow the advice of his royal mistress; and, trusting to his own art and talent, he felt secure of regaining the ascendancy over Bailly, of which the latter had been sensible during the period of their intimacy. Introducing himself in this sudden manner, the President had no opportunity of refusing his visit; and, though at first it was most distasteful to him, by degrees he was imposed on by the air of sadness and resignation which René assumed. He avoided at first revealing all he had discovered relative to Alix; but at length, with apparent reluctance, he confessed that he knew what had become of her.

"Oh, tell me!" exclaimed Bailly, — "let me hear of my poor child, although I am never to behold her more!"

"It were better, perhaps, that you should never meet,"

said René: "but she still lives; your fears have misdirected you respecting her danger. She is well."

"Where — where is she then?" cried the President, losing his apathy in his paternal feelings. "I have wealth, interest, — if she is still preserved, who shall prevent my claiming her?"

"She is in the revolted town of La Rochelle!" replied Bianco. "The companion of her flight was the Count La Mole, and she is now protected by Claude Emars, your late secretary, who has made himself notorious by cruelties and enormities practised against the faithful subjects of the crown, and the children of our holy church!" —René hid his face, while the President, horror-stricken, listened in silence. — "Yes," he continued, — "I regret to say, that she eloped from Paris, with this Claude. She refused to listen to my representations; professed her change of religion, — for she is now a Huguenot, — and has fallen into the habits and customs of that depraved sect."

"René," said the President, "you tell me of that which, from any but yourself, who are an injured person, and whom I pity, I could not listen to for a moment. The perfect purity of my daughter it would be as impossible to make me discredit, as that she is my own child. I know her to be misled by the errors of this accursed belief, and I believe her to have been imposed upon; but dare not to insinuate aught against her honour in my hearing!"

Bailly's eyes flashed with indignation as he spoke, and René saw that he had gone too far.

"The blessed saints forbid," exclaimed he, with well-feigned astonishment, "that I should utter a syllable which could be construed into such a meaning! Alix, I am convinced, is virtue itself! but she is in dangerous hands, and is deeply imbued with the fallacies of the new religion; and her position with regard to this minion, is one which may give cause for much scandal."

"I will immediately write, and command her to leave the town!" exclaimed Bailly. "During the truce which now exists, it will not be difficult to send to her, and I

will charge her, by her duty to her father, to obey me instantly."

"Do so," said René, with apparent joy. "Nothing would be so grateful to my feelings as once more to behold her safe in your protection. For myself, although I might claim her promise, I disdain to influence her feelings; and, however unwillingly, abandon my right, trusting that time may yet prove to her my devotion."

After much more conversation to the same purpose, in which René contrived to deceive the President into a belief of his own generosity and willingness to serve him and his daughter, Bailly determined to write to Alix, and call upon her to return to him.

This letter he confided to René, who, of course, took care that it should never reach its destination.

Marcel, in the meantime, jealous of the intimacy of his master with the Italian, whom he had always dreaded, began, from words which Bailly had dropped, to suspect that some scheme was going on which tended to little good. He had vainly endeavoured to obtain the means of discovering the purport of the long consultations which took place between the President and his Florentine friend; and annoyed at being foiled in what he considered part of his privilege, to know all his master's concerns, he set himself resolutely about finding out the truth.

All this time Alix, in the absence of her husband at Paris, was mourning over the ill success of her appeals to her father. Her heart was torn with her contending duties to him and to the confiding Claude, who had risked so much to save and protect her. She had written to her father, and set forth, with all the moving eloquence of truth, her obligations to him whose wife she now was; — had related all her sorrows, perils, and escapes; the reception she had met with from De Hommet, and all the particulars of her position; trusting that he would forgive the step she had thought it most prudent to take, and render her happy in his blessing.

These letters, it is scarcely necessary to say, were never received by Bailly. René had placed his emissaries in the

house of the President in Paris; and all passed through his hands, were read and destroyed.

When Claude, for so must still be called the attainted and outlawed Gabriel de Lorges Count de Montgomery, to whom his unfortunate father could not even leave a name in France,—when Claude quitted Paris and the faithful Mabille, he bent his course by unfrequented ways in order to escape the vigilance of the foes of his religion; and with a heavy heart began his journey back to his beloved Alix, to whom he longed to communicate his secret and his grief. Before, however, he permitted himself to think of his own affairs he resolved to make his way into Picardy, where the Prince of Condé awaited tidings from his party, which should determine him whether to follow, or not, the advice already offered him of flying to Germany, where the Marshals d'Anville and Montmorency were ready with a strong force to afford their aid. It was of the utmost importance that the Prince should be made aware of the fate of the gallant Montgomery, and Claude saw the necessity of speed in the communication: he therefore in various disguises traversed the country, and arrived in Picardy, where he found the Prince prepared for immediate action. Nothing could exceed his horror and indignation at the recital of Claude; and while he recognised the son of the murdered hero, he could only afford him tears and regret. He at first urged him to join the party in Germany, but on hearing all the ties of Claude at La Rochelle, he agreed that greater service could be done to the cause by his remaining in France. He informed Claude that his princess had lately quitted him to remain at his château in the Chartrain with her ladies and attendants: he should, therefore, find no difficulty in leaving France, and should forthwith commence his journey with all the men he could procure.

Claude then recommenced his wanderings, and, after traversing Normandy, and communicating with all the chiefs of the party, he crossed the Loire, and once more returned to La Rochelle, where he was warmly greeted by all his friends, to whom he related the melancholy story of the Count's betrayal. The astonishment of Alix was

extreme on hearing the mystery of his birth explained; and, while she hailed the son of the martyr to the cause of religion, she wept bitterly for his loss.

But Claude soon discovered that a secret grief was praying on her mind, and, with the deepest sympathy, he heard of her disappointment at her father's obdurate silence. He knew that the President was at his abbey in Anjou, having made all the inquiries he dared venture as he passed through that part of the country; and, while he endeavoured to soothe the agitated feelings of his wife, he felt that the hard and unbending character of her father afforded them little hope. Alix, however, could not imagine that the tenderness which she knew existed in his heart towards her could be thus entirely obliterated: she suggested the possibility of treachery, and the chances that her letters had not reached him. Claude, at length, resolved to relieve her mind at all hazards; and considering that at the present moment the harassing warfare which had been recommenced against the Rochellois was suspended, and a short truce existed, he hoped that by a personal interview with Bailly he might be able to soften his mind towards them.

Having conceived this plan he imparted it to Alix.

"I can," said he, "but fail at last; but we shall know the worst, and shall cease to be agonised by suspense."

"Your fears," urged he to her objections, "magnify the danger. I know the country well, am an experienced traveller; in my accustomed disguise of a mendicant friar I can go securely, and my return, I am persuaded, will bring you joy."

"No, Claude!" cried Alix, "I will repress this anxiety; since my father lives I will be content to remain at a distance from him—nay, separated for ever, rather than risk the loss of one still dearer. How could I have imagined such a project? Let us never think of it more."

Though the subject was at that time dropped, Claude failed not at different periods to renew it; and at length succeeded in obtaining the consent of his wife that he should undertake the journey, disguised as had been proposed.

Alix complied with less reluctance, hoping that he might return before the term of the truce was expired. They parted, therefore, not without many tears, and Alix sought in the society of Lesselline to lose the foreboding fears which immediately on his departure rose in her mind.

The regard of Bailly for his perfidious guest had, meanwhile, daily augmented; the abilities and accomplishments which had recommended René to the favour of Catherine were not lost on the President, who, having now renounced all public occupation, devoted his hours to retirement, which he delighted to share with the artful Italian.

At this period it was that René learnt, with feelings of unspeakable rage and jealousy, that it was on Cosmo Ruggieri Catherine had bestowed the grant of the Abbey of St. Mahé in Bretagne; and thus he found his rival possessed of what he had himself aspired to, such being the disgraceful practice of the time that places of sacred trust were given by the great to the meanest favourite, or purchased by the most unworthy.

The desire of equalling his rival and braving the Queen took immediate possession of his mind, and to accomplish this end he bent every faculty of his malignant and sordid soul.

"If," argued he mentally, "Bailly dies, the vacancy his death will occasion might be filled by me; why should he not, as Catherine herself suggested, bequeath it to me with the rest of his possessions? for his daughter's marriage with a heretic ought to bar her heritage."

Occupied with these projects he failed not, on all occasions, to insinuate into the President's mind sentiments unfavourable to Alix; and even hinted at her being so absorbed by zeal for her religion as to have been indifferent to her father's safety when she protected Claude, for he continued to deceive Bailly with the idea that she had been the means of his escape. The scene on the night of St. Bartholomew and her resolute tenderness would sometimes contradict his insinuation to the father's heart; but so artfully did he work on his credulity that his words soon effaced the slight impressions of reviving tenderness.

At length René ventured on the subject on which his hopes depended, and cautiously and carefully worked his way till Bailly was induced to agree that he should be named by his will his successor in the Abbey, leaving him funds to secure its possession. This his conscience allowed him without difficulty to do, as he considered that the religion of Alix and her husband effectually prevented them or their children from inheriting such property, and the alienation of so large a portion he considered a due punishment for her offence. The anxious advice and even entreaties of René failed, however, to induce him to deprive her of all claim on his large fortune, and a very considerable proportion was still left unmentioned as naturally belonging to Alix at his death. Annoyed at this circumstance, René endeavoured to derive consolation from the hope that, in the event of Alix making demand of her rights, he should have it in his power to prevent her obtaining justice in consequence of her faith.

It was at this moment that he was deeply annoyed by receiving a peremptory summons from his royal mistress to join her in Paris without a moment's delay, as the King of Poland was on his way from Cracow, and her intention was to give him the meeting at Lyons. She informed him that his leave of absence could be extended no longer, as she required him to execute some affairs of the greatest importance.

"I will not prevent your returning to Anjou on my departure," she wrote; "therefore fail not, on receipt of this, to hasten to Paris, as you value my favour."

"Her favour!" cried René bitterly,—"what does it bring me?—little but promises. I have, in the course of my service, it is true, had large sums from her, but her gifts to others have been equal if not greater, and I have only contributed to ruin the royal exchequer. I should have gained all—by the saints! I have richly earned it!—this last act of hers, however, shall not go unrevenged: to prefer that ignorant pretender to me who have devoted my science to her for years! But I must obey her still: she is now all powerful, and will continue so long under her son Henry's sway. I must not lose my

labour by wearying at the last. There is little fear of Alix writing again to her father during my absence; her last letter was utterly desponding, and she called it her last appeal. As she received no reply, of course she will venture no more—at least for some time,—and, doubtless, I shall return soon, as Catherine will be impatient to embrace her darling son."

Thus reasoning, he calmed his uneasiness, and leaving Bailly, who parted with him with regret, he hastened to Paris and his mysterious mistress.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LETTER.

"Celle qui git ici n'avoit point de seconde,
En vertus, en beauté, en graces, en honneur,
Et pour dire en un mot ce qu'elle eut de bonheur,
Ci gisent les Amours et les Graces du monde."

PASSERAT *on Marie de Clèves.*

"BIANCO," said Queen Catherine, when obeying her summons, he hastened to present himself before her, immediately on his arrival in Paris,—"Bianco, I have intercepted a letter from the King of France and Poland, addressed to Marie wife of Condé. It contains a promise, which, if kept, would destroy all my plans for the future, and a strong measure must annul it. I had no idea that Henry really loved this girl so much. I thought absence would weaken or destroy his affection, and besides, I know he has written tenderly to La Chateauneuf,—but that must have been but to deceive me. Read this strange letter, and judge what should be done."

René took the paper, not without emotion, for he observed the whole of it written in sanguine characters, and thus it ran:—

"MARIE, adored of my soul. Tortured and distracted, in absence from her who is my existence, I write to you with a pen dipped in my own blood, kneeling at the

altar of the Blessed Virgin, to give you news of one who night and day counts only the moments which intervene between our meeting. I am, O joyful certainty! I am King of France. My first act is to hail you as my Queen, to promise you by all I hold sacred in Heaven and on earth, that not a week shall pass when once I set foot on the soil of my native country, before I will lead you to the altar, and hear you proclaimed my wife. Receive this solemn vow, my own beloved Marie, and expect the accomplishment of it the instant I can announce to you the dissolution of that hateful contract which has hitherto separated us. Rome is propitious,—there will be no obstacles; we shall be united for ever, and no power shall part us.

(Signed) "HENRY,
"King of France and Poland."

René turned the letter over in his hand, and read the superscription "To the Princess Marie de Condé."—"This, of course, she will never receive," said he, coolly.

"You are dull, René," said Catherine, with a peculiar smile. "I shall despatch it instantly, and you are to be the messenger to bear it to her."

"I perceive," answered the Italian. "Madonna, your wit far passes mine. Methinks this sheet, travel-stained and worn, should be refreshed with certain perfumes which will add greater vigour to the letters, and impart a softer feeling to the sense."

"You have such perfumes, René," said the Queen; "spare them not, however costly,—they will save a crown. Go,—bear her this letter, and on your return bring me back word that I have no more cause of fear."

"Madonna," said the poisoner, deliberately, "there is a metallic power, one grain of which touching the lips will act like the look of the basilisk, and life shall be extinct in an instant. This placed upon the paper over the name of 'Henry,' will effect our purpose. Marie will seize upon the letter,—she will devour its contents,—she will kiss the signature. Let her do so, and you have no more to fear."

"But is this a sure method, Bianco?" gasped Catherine. "Might it not fail?"

"It will not," he replied. "But there are other means known to him to whom this secret has been revealed. Madonna, I hold the lives of men in my hand,—their existence depends on my breath; when I choose to exert my power all are my slaves," and he laughed triumphantly. "I must have for this service much gold, for the knowledge was dearly bought; can you at once supply me? Some who have claims upon me clamour for their dues, and I have not werewithal to satisfy them."

"René," said the Queen, "I have exhausted all my funds at this moment, and know not where to turn; the fêtes we must give on the King's arrival must dazzle by their splendour,—they shall excel all others. His coronation and his marriage," she continued, smiling, "his marriage with Louisa of Lorraine will be costly, and demand much gold; but your wants shall be supplied. Mark how I purpose to procure large means. In the Sainte Chapelle of the palace is a cross, of value not to be named, for in it is enclosed a large piece of the true cross. This the Holy Father has long sued for, and would give any sum to obtain, but the selfish churchmen of Paris would refuse to part with their treasure. Let a determined few take it in secrecy and silence from the altar, and, once transferred to Rome, gold would come pouring in upon us. The saints forbid that I should do an act of sacrilege, or dare to injure the sacred symbol! It is but obeying the command of the great head of our religion, to whom I have long promised it, and it will be placed in a fitter sanctuary than here, where heretics and schismatics pollute our altars with their deceptive vows."

"True," returned Bianco, "it is to aid the good cause, and all means are legitimate which have that for their object."

"Let it be done, René, and ask *me* not how," said the Queen; "the chapel doors need not be closed that night, and can seem forced if necessary. You no doubt know Italians ready to return to their own country, who will be glad to travel protected by the holy pledge."

"Florio has a chosen band ready and most willing for the service," replied René; "say no more, Madonna, you shall in all things be obeyed."

"Go first and bear this letter to the expectant Princess," said Catherine, "and on your return inform me of her fate. I purpose instantly setting forth to meet the King at Lyons; no time is to be lost; we must despatch business quickly, and while the Court is absent it will be easy to suppose that a robbery might take place."

"Thanks, good Madonna," said René, kissing her extended hand; "we will perform miracles if necessary."

* * * * *

The château of the Prince de Condé, in the Chartrain, was a moated building, strongly constructed, with huge towers and outer defences, capable of much resistance in case of assault. It was gloomy and vast, and stood in the midst of a flat corn country, commanding an extensive view for leagues round; the elevated spires of the magnificent cathedral of Chartres forming a conspicuous feature, as they towered above the woods, and attracted the eye from a great distance. Thick forests closed the castle in, whose recesses afforded sport to the huntsman; for there the deer and wild boar had their haunts, and the wolf occasionally was made an object of the chace; but pastime of this description had now been laid aside. The Prince had been detained so long at Paris, little less than a prisoner, that his château of Villebon had remained unvisited; and when he recovered a nominal liberation, he employed it in planning an escape from the thraldom in which he was held. He had sent the Princess to this retreat, — far from the Court and its seductions, — on hearing of the death of the King; and he hoped that change of scene and circumstances had obliterated, in the mind of Henry the Third, the memory of a passion disgraceful to the honour of his wife. When he fled to Germany, he considered that Marie was sufficiently guarded in his castle to prevent any danger, and he had laid on her strict and determined commands that, on no pretence, should she leave its walls. Nothing could be so utterly sad and for-

lorn as the position of the unfortunate Marie. — Deprived of all society but that of her dependents; wretched with her husband, whose affections she had never possessed, and who treated her with suspicion and distant coolness; her heart entirely given to Henry of Valois, in whom she fondly imagined existed every virtue, of which he was, in fact, devoid; trembling to think of him, yet dwelling on his name, — alive to all that concerned him, yet afraid to inquire the slightest particular; — it was, however, impossible to keep from her the knowledge of the death of Charles, and a thousand emotions filled her mind when she reflected on the consequences of that event. Letters had secretly been conveyed to her, on the first departure of her royal lover, through the Queen of Navarre; but for some time none had reached her, and her spirits and health had sunk in consequence. She had grown silent, and more than usually pensive; — ceased to occupy herself with her usual employments, and mournfully dreamed away her existence in repressed hope and regret. She imagined it possible that his heart had ceased to beat so warmly for her, — that he would now be able to bear their separation, — that his promises were by degrees being effaced from his mind. She tried to think of her domestic obligations, — she resolved to banish him from her thoughts, or, at least, not to allow them to dwell so incessantly upon his image; — she endeavoured to persuade herself that the time might come when she should be able to replace her love for him by the duty she owed her husband. — Alas! she sighed: —

"It may be that I love thee not —
How happy if my soul
At length its bondage had forgot,
And spurn'd its late control:
Like some bright native of the sky,
Escaped to blessed liberty!

"It may be that, like wither'd flowers,
Whose fragrant breath is gone, —
I can forget those summer hours,
Which sweetly lingered on: —
That sparkling stream, that willowy shore
May be my Paradise no more!

"It may be others' eyes may seem
As soft, as kind as thine;
The glory of another dream
May o'er my fancy shine;
And other voices speak as well
All that thy lips alone could tell!

"And forms may glide of equal grace,
Where once thy step has been;
And I shall scarce observe thy place
Is vacant in the scene:—
Nor when thy fav'rite haunts I see,
Remember they had charms for thee.

"And I may know thee near, nor seek
To meet those eyes of day;
In music's tone may hear thee speak,
And turn unmoved away:—
I may renounce thee!—may forget—
The time may come—but, oh!—not yet!"

Many mournful weeks passed in this solitary manner; and, though the Princess tried to persuade herself that she no longer desired to hear from her lover, she had chosen for her favourite retreat a chamber in one of the towers, which overlooked the principal entrance to the castle, in order that she might see the couriers as they went and came, with orders from her husband, to the troops quartered within the buildings of the great court of the château, with a faint hope that some in royal livery might one day meet her sight. Marguerite had been strangely silent of late on the subject of her brother, and in her previous letters had ventured advice more prudent than encouraging respecting him. Everything tended to depress her; and so sensitive had she grown from long and ineffectual watching, that her light and graceful figure became thin and fragile, and her cheek, once all bloom, as pale as snow.

She was looking one morning from her tower window towards the long avenue of high lindens, which formed a vista from the castle gates, and by which way all expresses must come, when she beheld a troop of horsemen galloping down the road with great speed, in the suite of a royal messenger, whom she recognised as wearing the costume of those attached to the service of the Queen-mother. Her heart beat violently: she had scarcely power to breathe or to look as they rapidly approached the gates, and rang the great bell which announced their arrival. The drawbridge was lowered instantly, and the party were received into the inner court. She saw no more, but waited in trembling anxiety till the messenger should be announced to her. At length she was informed of his request to see her, in order to deliver papers of importance. According to the etiquette

observed at the time, she desired that he might be conducted to her hall of audience, and leaving her tower she entered the large apartment where she was accustomed to receive visitors of importance.

It was a chamber very long and wide, with a row of high windows on each side; on the ceiling, the rafters of which were of dark oak, were emblazoned the arms of Condé; the walls were hung with tapestry representing classical subjects on a gigantic scale, and the wood-work between was massively carved. A dais rose between two of the windows, where was placed a throne and canopy of rich dark velvet, and it was here that the delicate and lovely Marie was seated when the royal messenger was announced.

René Bianco, meantime, had been conducted into a lower chamber, fitted up with warlike ornaments of spear and shield, and adorned with enormous pictures of the family of Condé, together with some of that of D'Estouteville, by whom the castle was built and originally possessed. When summoned to the presence of the Princess, he mounted the broad stone spiral staircase with a step less assured than usual, and he trembled as he entered the large, gloomy chamber, where, at the upper end, sat the beautiful and innocent creature who had been marked as a victim.

He approached, and knelt on the lower step of the dais, when Marie exclaimed,

"Ah! Messire René, I rejoice to see you;—tell me, is the Queen of Navarre well, and her Grace the Queen-mother?—What news do you bring me?"

"Gracious lady," replied Bianco, "their Majesties are well, and happy in the expectation of our beloved Sovereign's speedy arrival from Poland. They purpose immediately to set out on their way to meet him."

He then delivered the despatches with which he was charged, and Marie opened them. In that of the Queen-mother was enclosed the fatal letter from Henry of Valois, and as Marie looked at the superscription she changed colour and trembled violently; laying it, for a moment, on her lap, she perused the contents of Catherine's missive, which expressed the utmost tenderness and affection, and

hinted at the future in a manner at the same time mysterious and flattering. She then took up the letter of Henry, and opening it endeavoured to read; but her head grew giddy, her agitation became extreme, and gathering the papers together, first placing that in her bosom, she quitted the chamber, and retired to her private chamber in the tower.

René remained rooted to the spot, his face pale as death, —his eyes haggard,—his knees shaking,—and his whole appearance such as would have betrayed to an observer his guilty feelings; but he had been admitted alone to the Princess, her attendants had all withdrawn into the adjoining corridor, and there was no witness to the struggle in his bosom. He listened—started—bent his ear towards the opposite door—gasped for breath—and pressed his hands to his head, in an agony of impatient expectation. For the first time in his life he regretted his crime,—for the first time he hoped that his plan would fail. Marie was so young,—so lovely,—so confiding! She had smiled with such innocent sweetness as she welcomed her destroyer, that she had effected at least a momentary change in his nature.

"Catherine must be a fiend," exclaimed he, "to murder such a creature! And what am I?—Oh, God!"

At that moment he was startled by a sharp, shrill, wild cry from the tower chamber, and a dull sound as of a falling object: his hair rose,—his blood was chilled in his veins,—he clenched his hands and ground his teeth in agony; the sound had been heard by others, it was so strange and unnatural that it struck on the ear as something awful and portentous. Several of the Princess's attendants hurried from the adjoining corridor and entered the room; he was prepared for what followed,—shrieks and cries echoed through the castle; the voice of wailing and lamentation filled the place, and all the horror of the deed was made manifest to his senses.

Marie had been found lying on the ground, her hand pressed to her heart with the fatal letter tightly held,—the rest of the papers were scattered round, and had evidently been thrown from her when seized with the sudden death-pang.

She no longer breathed, although she was still warm, and the colour had not faded from her cheek; she must have died in an instant, as if struck with lightning; and her spirit had departed at the moment when she became conscious that all her earthly hopes were accomplished.

Had she lived, it would have been but to learn the fallacy of those hopes,—to have withered by slow degrees under the fearful conviction of the unworthiness of him she adored: remorse, regret, sorrow, and despair were saved her; she fell a victim innocent and happy, and Heaven received her before the taint of sin had rendered her unfit for its pure abodes.

Bianco, with a violent effort, roused himself from his stupor, and amidst the tears and exclamations of all around ordered that his train should be ready instantly to set forth on his return.

"Let this fatal event be kept secret for the present," said he, "lest it reach the ears of those of the court, and they become too suddenly aware of their misfortune. I undertake to report it with proper care to the Queen-mother and the family of the unfortunate Princess. Such occurrences are not unusual,—probably the contents of the letters of which I was, by evil chance, the bearer, were of a nature to occasion violent agitation; and the blood suddenly rushing to the heart has occasioned the loss of life. My embassy has had a sad result, and is one which, to the last moment of my life, I shall reflect on with agonised remembrance."

He mounted his horse, and, followed by his people, rode slowly from the castle; when half way up the avenue he beheld, emerging from the thick wood which extended on each side, a young fawn, which, with its graceful pace, ran before him till he reached the high iron gates leading to the road beyond, then suddenly stopping turned its full gaze upon him; from the large brilliant eyes two heavy tear-drops seemed falling, and the expression of the countenance was full of reproach. He started, and spurred his horse, which plunged and snorted and refused to advance, when, suddenly, the figure of the fawn became indistinct, and in a moment entirely disappeared from his sight: on

rushed his steed, and dashing through the gates took, with headlong rapidity, its way towards the town of Courville, and from thence to Chartres, where, hurrying to the cathedral, the superstitious and remorse-stricken Italian lost no time in prostrating himself before the shrine of the miraculous Black Virgin of Chartres, to whom he poured out a prayer of supplication and entreaty, that he might be delivered from the feeling of horror which oppressed him. After having done so, he felt relieved, and by the time he had reached Paris, every human sentiment of redeeming sorrow was effaced from his soul.

The Queen-mother and her party had already set out, but she had directed René to intimate to her, by a concerted token, forwarded by a courier, the success of her scheme, and at an early stage of her journey she became aware of the truth. Not a shade of regret, not a pang of remorse mingled with the exultation which this news gave to her mind; carefully concealing her fatal knowledge she hurried on, and amidst every outward demonstration of welcome and honour reached Lyons, the city at which she was to await the arrival of Henry the Third from Poland.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEW KING.

" Pr'ythee see there!
Behold! look! lo! how say you?" — *Macbeth.*

Along the shore of the Saône, on the parapet of the port called de la Feuillée, were seated, in rows, a great number of young women, whose costume was peculiarly attractive, even if their remarkable beauty had not excited the admiration of the passer-by. They were dressed in bodices and petticoats of dazzling whiteness; their heads and fine hair covered with large straw hats, tied under the chin with a bow of coloured ribbon. Some of them balanced an oar or a boat-hook in their hands, or were twisting pieces of rope, and gazing with that air, half listless, half anxious, which told that they were waiting to be employed.

These were, in fact, the *batelières* of the neat little boats called *bèches*, which lay along the river-side, covered with their awnings of linen stretched over hoops, and inviting the inhabitants of Lyons to trust themselves to the guidance of these nymphs of the stream on a short voyage to l'Isle Barbe and the opposite shores.

"And are the Queen-mother and all the court ladies really coming?" said one of the young girls: "we shall have a busy time while they stay, and pocket many a denier."

"We had need," said an elderly woman, with a surly air; "for little enough has been doing of late. I thought when all the Huguenots were rooted out we were to be better off; but though we destroyed the vermin till the river would hold no more bodies, we are just as poor as ever."

"Don't talk of it, Manon," answered another of the party; "it makes my heart bleed whenever I hear it named; and they say the late King died of grief for what he had been made to do;—and it's treason to talk about it now."

"Henry of Navarre is to come with the Court," observed a young coquette, adjusting her straw hat. "Does he admire fair beauties or dark, do they say?"

"Either," returned a laughing companion; "none come amiss to him:—but the scores of young gallants there will be!—we shall never have our oars idle!"

"Is the new King expected to-night?" asked another.

"He'll come too soon, arrive when he will," rejoined an old woman. "France wants something better than a coxcomb and a madman, like this and the last, for her King. The young Francis is worth all the rest, and he must be born too late."

"Well, it's all one to us, so as we get employed," said another. "Changes and troubles may do good to these great folks, but they ruin little ones. Hark! the bells are ringing!—the guns are firing!—the King's arrived!—Vive Henri Trois!—Vive la Reine Mère!—Viva! Viva!"

And all the fair *batelières* deserted their post to join the

shouting and expectant crowd, who were hailing the arrival of the fugitive King of Poland in his dominions.

Although late in the year, the season was as fine as is frequently known in the middle of summer; and the sun shone brilliantly on the magnificent cavalcade of the Queen-mother and her ladies, and the Queen of Navarre and her suite, as it wound along the mountain of Fourvières, which, together with that of St. Sebastian, forms an amphitheatre, commanding the majestic Saône, which confines within its embrace, and that of the Rhône, the gay and picturesque city of Lyons. Nothing could exceed the varied and beautiful view from the elevated road by which the royal party advanced; — hills, covered with verdure, rose on every side, the two grand rivers meeting at their feet; the city, with all its domes, and spires, and turrets, rising from their floods; and the magnificent and shadowy chain of the Alps in the eastern perspective.

The equipages of the two Queens, and the appointments of their trains, were gorgeous in the extreme; nothing was wanting to show honour to the beloved son of Catherine; and the Queen of Navarre, whose taste for splendour and carelessness of expense were not inferior to her mother's, was not sorry to have an opportunity of displaying her taste on this occasion.

The Queen-mother, with five of her ladies, appeared in a chariot covered with gilding and painting, laquais, dressed in splendid liveries, hanging on to the large *portières*, and pages and a host of other attendants running before and by the side. On great occasions, like the present, the Grande Bande, consisting of two hundred ladies, all of them of high quality, attended their royal mistress, some in carriages richly ornamented, others on horseback, their steeds gallantly caparisoned, and all accompanied by pages and valets. But the most remarkable equipage was that of the Queen of Navarre, who has herself described a similar one in her own Memoirs. It was a *litière* of large size, supported by light and elegant gilt pillars; the interior was hung with curtains of Spanish velvet of carnation colour, deeply bordered with gold embroidery; and from the top depended draperies of white silk in knots

with devices. Between each pillar were glasses brilliantly painted, each pane also bearing devices, to the number of forty; and great ingenuity had been displayed in contriving these, which were, for the most part, allusive to the power and influence of the sun, moon, and stars. Some were mysterious, and understood only by the Queen herself, or some of her favourite ladies, and were expressed in Spanish, Italian, Latin, French, and other languages. A few were as follow:—A bright flame, with the words, "Mas ardor que lumbre;" *i. e.* "more heat than light."

Another presented a fire casting up numerous sparks towards a sky filled with stars, and beneath, "por cada estrella, sù cintilla,"—"for each star its ray;"—an ambiguous motto, which might mean to illustrate the vain attempts of mere sparks to reach the stars.

A rose-bud appeared in silver, with this motto:—"Quando si mostra men' tant' è più bella."

A phœnix, burning in the sun's rays, and the scroll, "Qui mi da la morte mi da la vita."

A sky filled with stars, and one conspicuous above the rest with the words, "Entre todos querida."

A sun in its meridian, the motto, "Piu ardente quando piu eminente."

Many of the cavaliers of the day were suspected of having supplied the artist with different compliments and gallant ideas, and the mystery attached to these infinitely enhanced their value in the eyes of the fair travellers.

After this splendid litter, which was drawn by numerous horses, all gay and gorgeous with trappings, followed others filled with magnificently attired ladies: between them rode by tens, attended by their gouvernantes, the young maids of honour of Marguerite, on white palfreys with silver housings.

A long train of cavaliers mounted on superb chargers, some wearing brilliant armour, and others gay dresses of peace, came glittering along with the King of Navarre and the Duke of Anjou, both carefully surrounded by chosen friends of Catherine, who were, in fact, no other than their guards, although they thus appeared at liberty. The other royal princes of the houses of Lorraine and Guise

made an equally splendid figure, and the whole scene was gay and imposing beyond description.

This gorgeous company was met by the anxiously expected monarch Henry the Third, who appeared in far different guise with his worn and jaded band of friends and soldiers; for he had no sooner heard of the death of his brother, than aware of the attempts which would be made by his Polish subjects to detain him, he had abruptly quitted Cracow in the night in disguise, and, attended but by few gentlemen, had ridden post from town to town, allowing himself scarcely resting time till he reached the frontiers of France, and he now made his appearance, bringing with him none of the state or splendour of which he was so fond.

His arrival, however, was hailed by his friends with enthusiasm, and as every care had been taken by his politic mother to secure his good reception, he had no reason to complain of his welcome.

Almost his first question was news of Marie de Condé, and he could not conceal his chagrin on being informed that she was detained in Normandy by illness, and had been unable to accompany the Queen-mother on her expedition to meet him.

"We had not purposed to take this journey," said Catherine, "till almost a few hours before we set out, but our impatience to hail our King prevented our waiting his return to Paris; some therefore have been constrained to remain behind who would otherwise have joined us. Let not their absence cloud the joy of this meeting; there shall be nothing in future but smiles in France."

The cloud upon the King's brow contradicted her boast, and she felt that she had a difficult task to fulfil in informing him of the truth, but she shrank not, resolved to carry her point of uniting him to a princess of her own choice. She had informed herself of the impression which the extreme beauty of Louise de Lorraine had made on him when he visited her father's court on his way to Poland, and hoped that the admiration which he had openly expressed of the Princess would not pass away.

She was prepared for a burst of passionate grief, and had

laid her plans accordingly, making up her mind to endure and to triumph over all. Nevertheless, though she was thus working for the aggrandisement of the family of Lorraine, there was one of them whose influence she dreaded; and without whose removal her schemes would prove of no avail. She had long writhed beneath his power, and striven to escape from the thraldom of his dictation. In a late conference he had venutred to throw out hints that he was in possession of a secret which, if divulged, would greatly injure her reputation in France, already sufficiently canvassed; and she secretly resolved to rid herself at the first opportunity of an enemy so dangerous as the aspiring Cardinal de Lorraine, for her ambitious foe was no other.

He was, however, now of the party which had met to do honour to the King, and was treated by her with all that marked distinction, respect, and kindness with which she was in the habit of blinding her intended victims; and the Cardinal, elated with the honours showered upon him, beheld a future opening, by the near connexion which he should hold with his sovereign, of dignity and power.

The inhabitants and governors of Lyons exerted themselves to the utmost to show their sense of the compliment conferred upon them by the sojourn of so many royal guests, and all their riches and magnificence were displayed in the succession of fêtes given to their distinguished visitors.

One of the most splendid abodes in this opulent city was fitted up as the temporary residence of the Queens; and all that luxury and ingenuity could invent, or gold purchase, was heaped around them.

The chambers of the Queen of Navarre were in particular arranged with extraordinary taste; and some of the most costly productions of the looms of Lyons were displayed to attract her admiration. The walls were hung with velvet and satin of the richest fabric; and one private apartment was adorned with hangings formed of silk, covered with columns of silver stuff embroidered in high relief with gold cord: between each column was represented, in needlework of the most delicate description, a

full-length figure of a monarch of France in gorgeous robes of state, enriched with jewels and gold of enormous value. All the canopies and seats were of cloth of gold and silver, worked after a pattern from Persian designs, and representing scenes from the history and fable of that country.

For several weeks nothing was thought of but uninterrupted revelry, and the extraordinary splendour displayed in the dresses of all the royal and noble persons engaged exceeds description. Henry the Third appeared to lose himself in the delight of these amusements, and the only shade that disturbed his felicity was the absence of his intended Queen, the unfortunate Marie.

His reigning favourite, Du Guast, was now to him all in all; and this artful courtier, having been bribed to do so by the Queen-mother, amused his attention by every means that he could invent in order to occupy him from thoughts which she dreaded should too often intrude: she had hinted to Du Guast that if Marie became the chief care of his royal master his power would soon end, and catching at once the idea of the importance of keeping them apart as long as possible, he seconded her views with all his ingenuity.

A visit to Avignon was arranged, and some of the party it was settled should go with the King and Queen-mother, who desired to be present, and assist at a grand procession of penitents called *Battus*, into which fraternity the King, who affected extraordinary piety, desired to be admitted. The Cardinals of Lorraine and Armagnac accompanied them, and wondrous was the preparation, and ceaseless the din of bells announcing the solemn ceremony. With assumed humility the haughty Cardinal of Lorraine walked barefoot in the ranks of the holy pilgrims, his head uncovered, and bearing an enormous crucifix. The King, Queen-mother, and many of their train attended, and the parties were distinguished by their colours; the King's penitents being dressed in white, the Queen-mother's in black, and those of the Cardinal in blue. They had fasted that day, but after the fatigues of the long procession, and the almost interminable religious

ceremony, it was deemed proper that some refreshment should recruit their exhausted strength.

Catherine's kindness was particularly marked towards the Cardinal of Lorraine, and on his complaining of excessive thirst, she with her own hands poured him out a draught of wine, which he drank to her health, accompanying the action with one of those gallant compliments for which he was more famed than for the piety which had that day edified the world.

That evening the Cardinal was taken very ill, the thirst of which he had complained increasing rather than diminishing, and so violent a fever came on that his attendants were alarmed; he uttered the most incoherent expressions, and used language so unfit for the mouth of so exalted a churchman that those around him shrank back appalled. His life was well known to have been profligate in the extreme, but the revelations he made in his ravings amazed those who knew him best. On his nephew the Bishop of Rheims being sent for, so far from expressing any sympathy, he uttered a jest which was retailed with laughter at the time.

"I see nothing in my uncle," said he to Queen Catherine, "which should make us despair of his recovery, for he retains all his accustomed habits, and expresses himself in his accustomed language."

The Cardinal died, and his sudden death was attributed to the fatigues which he had undergone, and the exposure to the weather in the procession which he had imprudently attended.

Notwithstanding this occurrence, the gorgeous feasts and entertainments prepared for the King were continued; at length the parting fête was given which was to crown all by its magnificence. The Queen-mother had expressed a wish that that day her daughter, of whose beauty and extraordinary splendour and taste in dress she was peculiarly proud, should indulge the ladies of Lyons by appearing in her most gorgeous habiliments, together with all her ladies, —her own appearing according to her directions in garments exquisitely fashioned.

Marguerite, excited by the admiration which followed

her wherever she appeared, and exhilarated by hopes that Henry of Navarre was not insensible to the charms which bewildered all others, exerted herself to please and dazzle and delight. She had recovered her former spirits; her wit, and grace, were the theme of every tongue, the attraction of every heart; and but that she regretted the absence of her beloved Marie, whose illness had been announced to her, she would have felt perfectly happy. However, she was sure that they should soon meet, and she had every reason to believe that she should before long hail her friend as a sister and as Queen of France.

The dress in which Marguerite appeared on the occasion of the memorable *festin* at Lyons is thus described by her eulogist Brantome. Her head was adorned with a great quantity of large pearls and precious stones, and above all diamonds of immense value, placed amidst her glossy hair in the form of stars, as though contending with heaven and its starry nights in splendour and radiance. Her graceful form of commanding height was arrayed in a robe so rich and heavy with its gorgeous ornaments, that none but one so majestic and perfectly made in all proportions could have ventured to appear in it, as it would have overpowered and crushed those of ordinary size or figure. The stuff which composed it had been a present from the Grand Signor to the Queen of Navarre. It was of cloth of gold covered with raised work of different tinted gold from its ground, and embroidered in borders with pearls and gems of every colour in flowers and leaves. The fringes were resplendent, and the whole costume such as surpassed in costliness anything that had ever been beheld before in France; it was thought "a chef-d'œuvre of art, and the quantity used for the robe was fifteen ells, each ell being worth a hundred crowns of gold." Her enthusiastic historian describes her manner as a happy mixture of dignity and softness, peculiar to herself, and unlike that of any other princess, however distinguished for beauty or for grace; her speech was grave, and yet full of sudden flashes of merriment which were quite irresistible, — her eloquence unapproachable, and her smile a paradise in itself. Henry of Navarre sat by her side, and he could

not but acknowledge that she was fascinating and lovely in the extreme.

"But alas!" he said to himself, "she loves not me. Vanity is her idol. I am nothing to her. I wish she were less a coquette, or that I could disbelieve the stories of her idle vanities and deception. But how should the daughter of such a mother be otherwise than faulty? although, to do her justice, she has none of her worst qualities."

Thus he mused, and gazed, and philosophised, and admired, till his heart began to melt beneath the glory of her beauty's rays, and Marguerite thought no cloud could ever obscure the happiness of that enchanted time. The Queen-mother was seated near them at table, — mirth and wit were at the highest, — restraint and ceremony were banished, and every one appeared free and at ease. Catherine, elated and joyous, was speaking gaily to the King, and amongst other topics talked of peace.

"We are now," she said, "secure of the continuance of that blessing; the lamented Cardinal de Lorraine is gone, who was said by common rumour to have been the only cause of its long delay; but that I cannot believe," she added, observing that her words were remarked by some at table who were gravely silent, — "I cannot credit it of so great and wise a prelate, whose every thought was for the good of France! Alas! both the country and we all have lost much in his death. Scarcely had she concluded these words, however, than she turned to some of her immediate friends, remarking in a low tone, "He was one of the most unworthy and dangerous of men, and we are safe only now that he is in his grave."

As she spoke she took from the hand of her son a cup of wine which he presented to her.

"Let us," said he, smiling, for he had heard her remark aside, "drink to the memory of the Cardinal, whose double character you give so well."

Catherine was about to raise the cup to her lips, when, on a sudden, sounded in her ears a sharp shrill cry which seemed to pierce her brain, and starting up with a gesture of horror, her hands trembling, and her face livid, she shrieked out as the cup fell from her grasp,

"Jesu! the Cardinal de Lorraine! — see! — there — — before me!"*

"Mother!" cried Henry, "you dream — compose yourself — what image have you conjured up?"

Catherine gazed still upon some object invisible to all other eyes — followed it from arch to arch of the extensive pillared chamber, with dilated orbs and straining vision — then heaving a deep sigh, and shuddering violently, she sank back in her seat. The guests were alarmed and disordered — every one pressed round the Queen — exclamations, questions, entreaties overwhelmed her — with a great effort she recovered herself, and looking up she said, crossing herself with much appearance of devotion, —

"Strange effect of imagination! Either I am greatly deceived, or I but this moment beheld that good man pass before me on his way to Paradise, to which blissful place of eternal joy methought I saw him mount as I gazed."

A chill passed through the assembly, and every one looked at his neighbour with fear and misgiving: all pleasure was at an end, for the attempts to restore it were forced, and did not answer. The King hastened to conclude the feast, and the guests, who had met so joyously, retired to their different homes, dispirited and amazed.

Meantime the Queen-mother, seeking her chamber, retired to her couch fainting and fevered: she would not part, as usual, with her ladies, but with convulsive starts exclaimed every now and then, closing her ears with her hands, and shutting her eyes, —

"Together! — that cry comes again — and he, too — he is still there! shall I never be able to banish him from my sight?"

All night she continued, at intervals, to be violently agitated; and at length her senses became altogether disordered. The King and Marguerite of Navarre were sent for, and found her in a high fever. When she saw Henry, however, her consciousness seemed suddenly to return; she became calm and desired that every one should retire, leaving her alone with her son.

* May not this scene, which is attested by many of the historians of the time, have suggested to Shakspeare that which it so closely resembles in *Macbeth*?

They remained together for some time, during which Catherine revealed to him, as if she had but now received the intelligence, the sudden demise of the Princess Marie; and accounted for her illness by the shock she had received.

"You know, my son," said she, "I am always warned of all that happens to me, and at table to-day the vision which so disturbed me was doubtless sent as a sign of the affliction in store."

But Catherine spoke to one insensible of her words. As soon as she began to tell him of the increased illness of Marie he became frightfully alarmed, and a presentiment of the truth flashed upon him. He listened to the imaginary details of her malady with silent terror; and when the fatal truth reached him he sank senseless on the floor beside his mother's bed. She was far from having intended to let him know the event in this manner, but in the present state of her mind she was scarcely aware of what she had done; and no sooner had she related the fact which weighed upon her mind with fearful force than she relapsed into her ravings.

Marguerite, on hearing her cries, rushed back to the chamber with her attendants, and the sight of her brother, prostrate and apparently lifeless, confounded her with terror.

The King was borne away, and every effort used to restore animation to him, for a long time in vain. For three days he remained immoveable and silent, except by occasional groans, and it was feared his reason had altogether given way. At the end of this time the Duke de Guise, and some other of his friends visited him, and used every endeavour to cause his grief to take a form less dangerous; — they wept, they extolled the virtues of the lost princess, they dwelt on her graces, and recalled her sayings and actions until at length their attempts produced the desired effect, and Henry burst into a flood of tears. This passion of grief continued so long, that new fears were entertained that he would become exhausted by its violence.

He refused all sustenance, and rejected every entreaty to consider his health. He never inquired for his mother

during the whole period, and she remained in a state of mental and bodily suffering impossible to describe. At the end of a few days, when her fever subsided, she seemed to wake as from a dream, and desired to be carried into her son's chamber. This was in vain opposed; and, arrived there, she appeared astonished to find he was aware of the calamity he had sustained.

"Who told the King of this?" she inquired feebly.

"It was your Grace, who yourself communicated it," was the reply.

Henry started from the ground, where he had cast himself. — "Mother," he cried, "unsay those fearful words! — Tell me they were but the ravings of your fever, and that my Marie still lives! I have been deceived all along, — you know so well how to deceive, — this time it shall be a virtue in you."

"Alas! Henry," replied Catherine, "I know not how I told you. I should never have found courage or power to relate the direful event, had I not been raving with fever. Oh! my son, — it is but too true!"

She was interrupted by a loud burst of laughter from Henry.

"Then we will make merry in honour of the event," he cried, wildly. "Let me have funeral robes prepared instantly, — let all the furniture of my houses, — my carriages — my dresses, speak of her fate! Send," he continued, turning to one of the nobles round, "send straight, my dear Souvray, and have dresses made for me of all kinds, to the value of six thousand crowns. I will give you the pattern, — let us set about it without loss of time; — every aiguillette I wear shall be garnished with têtes-de-mort, — no other ornament will I have in embroidery, in jewels, in ribbons, — from my hat to my shoes all shall be covered with the signs of death. It will be brave! My mother will admire it — she is so fond of death; — ha! ha! — she shall invent for me: — let the poets write elegies, epitaphs on her, — I will read only those. Is Passerat with us? — Yes; bid him come to me, and we will talk of funeral subjects fit for his muse. This is as good as all the fêtes of Lyons, — nay, the best of all, for it shall last for ever!"

In this manner the unfortunate victim of Catherine's ambitious cruelty raved for weeks, and her tortured heart began to despair of his recovering the reason which had suddenly become obscured. It is possible that the

> "delicate chain
> Of thought, once tangled, never cleared again;"

for his subsequent conduct, his cruelties, vices, and extravagant wickedness might well lead to the supposition.

He did, however, recover to all appearance, but only to put into execution the fancy which his madness had suggested. His books, furniture, dress, — all, as he had said, were covered with ensigns of death: he appeared in public, at different festivals given throughout his kingdom during the progress he made on his way to Rheims, where his coronation was to take place, adorned with these symbols in profusion; pendent by his side was a large rosary, all of death's-heads, and inscriptions and mournful trappings environed him on every side.*

Notwithstanding all this, Catherine found, to her surprise, that he made no opposition to her express desire that he should form an alliance with Louise of Lorraine, and all preliminaries having been soon concluded, — for the Count de Vaudemont, her father, was too much flattered and delighted to oppose any obstacle to so unexpectedly advantageous a match, — the favourite, Du Gaust, was sent to fetch the bride, who met the royal party at Rheims; and, almost before she could recover from her amazement at the proposal, she found herself received as Queen of France.

Henry was so enraptured with the remarkable beauty of his young bride that he appeared suddenly to lose all remembrance of his former passionate attachment; in excuse for his intemperate grief it was given out that he had been bewitched by an ear-ring and a cross *; and with a frivolity and absurdity of which he gave many proofs in aftertimes, he occupied himself entirely with the preparations for the ceremony of the marriage and coronation, which were to take place together. It seemed a kind of

* Historical.

transport with which he entered into the most minute details, — planned the dresses for himself, his bride, and his courtiers. Nothing could exceed the extravagant luxury of the arrangements ; and so long did it take to dress the royal pair on the eventful day that they were not ready to hear mass till five o'clock in the evening ; this gave much disgust to many, and was also looked upon as a bad omen, joined to the circumstance of the crown having twice fallen from the King's head during the ceremony, and on his replacing it the third time he complained of its giving him great pain. In the hurry and confusion, the master of the ceremonies had forgotten the custom of bestowing the kiss of peace, and when all was concluded, it was recollected too late that Te Deum had not been sung !

CHAPTER X.

THE FLIGHT.

Abandon delay ! — See, the whole assemblage of slender plants, pointing to the bower with fingers of young leaves agitated by the gale, make signals for thy departure. — *Songs of Jayadeva.*

In Paris, during the absence of the Court, an event had occurred which filled men's minds with horror and amazement. The great cross of the Holy Chapel of the Palace had been stolen in the night-time, by, it was generally supposed, a band of Italian ruffians, whose unpunished crimes and constant depredations had excited the indignation of the Parisians ever since they first made their appearance at the time of the Nopces de Paris, as the massacre was sometimes termed.

The appearance of a comet at this period filled the whole nation with apprehension, and none suffered from superstitious fear more than the Queen-mother herself. She began to dread that some judgment was about to fall upon the land, in consequence, not of the numerous crimes of which she was daily guilty, but of her having given permission to René to abstract the holy relic to be bartered at Rome for gold. She heard with surpise and terror, in the

streets, her name coupled with this act, and it appeared clear to her that she had been betrayed.

Instead of performing any acts which should restore to him the lost affections of the people, Henry the Third gave himself up entirely to every species of dissipation which the depraved taste of the time could invent. His former talents, which had promised much, seemed entirely clouded;—he never attended to public affairs, but, leaving all to his mother and his ministers, who were at her disposal, spent whole days in devising new dresses for himself and his wife, of whom he seemed childishly fond, and who, having a mind entirely vacant, possessed no sort of power over him. He would cut out her robes, and sit by to see them fashioned,—would stand for hours performing the office of hairdresser to her and his effeminate courtiers, who all imitated his habits, till the Court became a scene of folly and disgusting levity, fit only to excite the contempt of the lowest of the people.

He was execrated and held in abhorrence by all his subjects; and on the escape of the Duke of Anjou, which was at length effected, so many flocked to his standard that Catherine began to see that she had carried her desire of sway too far in allowing Henry to become a mere mark of scorn to the world, which she wished to govern without a competitor. She heard with vexation of the renewal of the proposition for a marriage between Anjou and the Queen of England, and resolved to oppose the views of her younger son, whom she never liked, by every means in her power.

She, therefore, assumed a friendly appearance towards the captive King of Navarre, and determined so to cajole and blind him that he should imagine his interests were better taken care of by his remaining than by flying to join the armies of his brother-in-law. She, however, dreaded the influence and the clear-sightedness of Marguerite, and renewed her plans to keep them from any union of sentiment;—she saw Navarre's weakness with respect to beauty, and she was constantly introducing to his notice some new and fascinating person, who for a time was tutored to attract his attention from the wife of whom he

had lately shown himself too fond. The grief of Marguerite for the loss of her friend, the Princess de Condé, knew no bounds, and the tenderness of her amiable husband's nature, which could never endure the sight of female sorrow, led him to offer her every consolation which sympathy could imagine; thus poor Marguerite in all her grief had a happiness which she had scarcely hoped for, and the transient nature of which she did not then dream of. But Henry of Navarre, in the midst of all this apparent ease and carelessness, was nursing the great projects which he afterwards executed, and planning schemes for the relief of his oppressed country, which he felt his flight could alone forward.

Du Guast, the still reigning favourite of Henry the Third, had conceived a passion for Mademoiselle de Torigni, the beloved companion of Marguerite, but had been repulsed with disdain by that high-minded lady on venturing to declare his admiration. A feeling of bitter hatred had ever since taken possession of his heart, and he watched the opportunity of injuring both her and her mistress by every possible means. The first was to inspire suspicions in her husband's mind of the nature of Marguerite's regard for a page who was a favourite of the Queen, and who was no other than the person she had saved on the night of St. Bartholomew.

It was agreed that Henry of Navarre should be advised to insist on the dismissal of both this page and the female companion of his wife, as it was represented that such close intimacies were both dangerous and unbecoming.

At first Henry of Navarre would not listen to any representations which tended to disturb the peace of Marguerite, but at length the train was so artfully laid, that he fell into the snare and remonstrated with the Princess on the subject. Her pride instantly took the alarm, and she angrily proclaimed her resolution to retain both her friend and her page. Much discussion ensued, in which Marguerite, indignant at the suspicions of her husband, lost her temper and her prudence, and a quarrel and coldness ensued which estranged them more than ever. Added to her grief at this occurrence was the fact of her being com-

manded by her brother to send La Torigni, without loss of time, to a relation of her own in Anjou, and dismiss the page Endymion from her service. Tears, reproaches, passion, indignation, were of no avail; and Navarre became aware, too late, of the tyranny to which he had given a sanction by his interference in the first instance.

La Torigni, attended by the broken-hearted Endymion, who, like too many of her attendants, was passionately attached to Marguerite, was despatched to the domain of her cousin, the Baron de Chastelas, and in his secluded abode wept her separation from her beloved mistress.

In order to lull the suspicions of Henry of Navarre, and to keep him a contented prisoner at large, it had been announced to him that the lieutenancy of the kingdom was to be conferred on him in the course of a very short time; and so well did he play his part, that the King and Queen-mother believed him to be entirely deceived, and their dupe in every particular.

Navarre had been suffering from an attack of ague, and one night lay silent in his bed, while D'Armagnac and D'Aubigné, his two faithful friends, watched beside him.* They were mute, thinking he slept, when suddenly they heard deep sighs, and heard him uttering, in a low and mournful voice, parts of verses from the eighty-eighth psalm,—

"'Oh, Lord!'" he whispered, "'My soul is full of trouble. — I am counted as one of them that go down to the pit: and I have been even as a man that hath no strength. Free among the dead, like unto them that are wounded and lie in the grave: who are out of remembrance, and are cut away from thy hand. I am so fast in prison that I cannot get forth. My lovers and friends hast thou put away from me; and hid mine acquaintance out of my sight!'"

D'Aubigné, on hearing this, having long watched for an opportunity to express the desire of himself and his friends that they should make an effort to escape the intolerable bondage in which they were held, and which they had long thought Henry bore too tamely, advanced

* See the Memoirs of D'Aubigné

to the bed, and drawing aside the curtains, addressed the King in these bold words : —

" Sire, — it is then true that the grace of God still lives in your heart ! You lament the absence of faithful friends and servants ; they at this moment are deploring *your* absence, and striving by all means to set you at liberty : but you have only tears in your eyes while they have weapons in their hands ; they fight the foes you serve ; they fear only God, you fear a woman, — before whom you hold up your hands in supplication, while they grasp the sword that would become you ; you kneel and sue, while they are armed and mounted. The Duke D'Anjou commands the men who defended you in your cradle. Why should they fight beneath the banner of a Catholic ? Why are you a slave here rather than their leader, — instead of leaving your cause in his hands ? Those who executed the massacre of St. Bartholomew know well that their victims will find avengers. You might be glorious, and you stay here to be trampled on ! As for myself and my companion here, wearied with your long and ignoble patience, we were concerting measures of escape for to-morrow, when your sighs interrupted us. When we are gone, the only faithful friends left near you, who will prevent the poisons of the Queen-mother from being employed ? Do you doubt her will or her power to sacrifice you by this means, as she has already done by those you deplore ? You are a marked victim, — stay here and die the death of a dog ; fly with us, — and be the hero of a great nation ! "

Henry started up, his pale cheek crimsoned with shame and indignation.

" Am I then so much despised by those I love ? This must not be. But you are right, my delay has been too long, and shall be put an end to. We will fly, my friends, — and this," said he, smiling, " shall be the last time we will talk of flying. Henceforth we will stand against our enemies and leave all this artful policy, which I have perhaps too long followed, to the deceivers who surround us, — the sword alone shall be our counsellor, and God alone our guide. Yes, mother, — dear murdered mother,

your device shall be mine from this time. — PEACE, — VICTORY, — or DEATH."

A solemn compact was then agreed upon between the friends, never to relinquish the enterprise of escape, whether allured by caresses or alarmed by menaces, and to be at eternal enmity with whoever should betray their purpose.

Several officers had of late been disgusted with the manner in which places had been given by the King to his worthless favourites, and these consented to assist the party and to join their cause. So confident had the Court become of Navarre's content, and of his persuasion that the lieutenancy of the kingdom would be soon his, that no objection was made to his extending his hunting excursions as far as St. Germain. This, therefore, gave him an excellent chance, and he resolved not to lose it this time, as he had done before, for want of precaution.

The day on which they had decided for the flight of the King of Navarre, he went early in the morning to the chamber of the Duke de Guise, with whom he was on very intimate terms; and, finding him not risen, sat beside his bed, and began to converse in the most familiar manner on his future prospects. He dwelt largely on the delight he felt at his approaching promotion, and boasted without restraint of the great actions he would perform, with such an appearance of frankness and vanity that De Guise was completely deceived. He had scarcely quitted him when the Duke, knowing that to turn Henry of Navarre into ridicule was just a pastime to delight the King, hastened to dress himself and pay him a visit, and divert him with a recapitulation of the conceit and credulity of his captive.

Great merriment was excited at the King's levée when De Guise's comic description was heard. The foppish and effeminate minions of their degraded master were overcome with laughter and excitement. King Henry uttered a thousand bitter and cutting remarks, all of which were applauded and admired.

"Poor, vain fool!" cried Henry. "It was our purpose to have curtailed him of his amusement, and have

confined the bounds of his hunting, — but it is useless: let him follow his hounds and fly his hawks, he will never seek game beyond it. He is an idiot, whom the fair face of a woman can seduce from any purpose, and the fair words of a man deceive into any belief."

Meantime the object of their scorn had set out on the hunting party which they had planned; some of his friends remained behind to observe events, and give notice of danger. In the evening, D'Aubigné, who had attended the King's couchée, was struck by observing that Fervaques, one of the discontented lords who had offered to join the party, was busily engaged in conversation with the King. They were so earnest in discourse, that they did not perceive his entrance nor his exit. His suspicions were excited; and resolving to know the worst, he posted himself outside the gate of the palace till Fervaques issued forth. As he did so, he found himself suddenly caught by the arm, and a voice thundered in his ear, — "Wretch, have you betrayed us?"

Fervaques was too much taken by surprise to deny the truth, and confessed at once that he had been seduced by the recollection of the former kindnesses of Henry the Third. "Go," he said, "you who are faithful to your master — go and save him — there is yet time!"

D'Aubigné lost no time in going to the King of Navarre's stables, where, in expectation of the necessity of their being suddenly required, the equerries had for some time kept their horses in breath by galloping them in a covered course. While they were getting them ready, the Prévôt des Marchands passed, for whom the King had sent with an intention of charging him to guard well the city gates, and suffer no one to go out; but before the order could be executed the equerries had got out of the town, and proceeded at full speed to Senlis.

The King of Navarre returning from the chase, which he had pursued from break of day, and seeing his horses in the suburbs of the town of Senlis, where they were resting, inquired what was the matter, for as yet he had arranged no regular plan of action, and had not contemplated so early a departure.

"Sire," answered D'Aubigné, "Fervaques is a traitor, and our whole design is betrayed by him to the King; he has confessed — not a moment is to be lost; death and shame lie in the road to Paris, elsewhere life and glory await you. Fly to Sedan or Alençon; either will afford you refuge for the present. The moment is come to give you to your faithful friends, who anxiously await your arrival amongst them."

"Fewer motives would suffice, D'Aubigné," said the Prince, shaking his hand: "let us set forth."

"The two guards must be dispatched," said one of his friends; "there is no other way."

"On no account," replied Henry; "I would not cause their death for all the good I may gain. No, I have a better plan; send St. Martin hither forthwith, and see if we cannot gain our point by a little ready wit."

The guard was accordingly summoned.

"St. Martin," said Henry, "I am just informed that certain of my enemies in Paris have reported falsely of me to the King, accusing me of an intention to join the Duke d'Anjou. To you I confide the task of undeceiving his Majesty. Go, I entreat, instantly, and request to know whether it is his will that I return to Court to refute the calumny, or continue my hunting here."

St. Martin, much flattered and entirely unsuspicious, set out as he was ordered, and Henry gave out that he should pass the night at Senlis, awaiting the answer of the King.

A troop of players were at the time passing through Senlis, and he had ordered them to represent one of their pieces, and repaired to the temporary theatre to witness the performance. With every appearance of interest he listened and looked on, while one of those farces were acted which were then beginning to succeed the religious dramas of the monasteries.

The plot of this piece was simple enough, but not without point, showing that nothing could subdue the tendency of the French to criticise their rulers, and the actors played with much spirit and humour.

There were many allusions to the King's extravagance,

and every sharp rebuke contained in the dialogue was applauded rapturously by the audience, who were entirely occupied by the scene. Henry, who had watched his opportunity, now summoned the second of the guards appointed to attend him, and feigning to have recollected suddenly that the King was to leave Paris for Beauvais Nangi, he entreated him to set out immediately by another road in order to meet King Henry, whom he feared St. Martin would miss.

Both these spies being thus removed, Henry quitted the theatre unobserved, and, collecting those of his followers on whom he could most rely, they mounted their horses and began their journey: the night was very cold and dark, and they were obliged to take a devious course to arrive at Alençon without attracting suspicion.

On the evening of the next day, as they were entering a village, they were joined by a portly man well mounted, of whom they asked their way. He replied, with rather suspicious looks at the party, that they were in the right road—"I advise you to ride fast," said he, "and you may reach Alençon before night has closed in. What with one party and another scouring the country, there is little peace or rest in any town or village."

"This seems a snug little place," observed D'Aubigné, who to prevent suspicion pretended to wish to make a halt, though in reality they were impatient to get rid of their new companion, and to pass through all villages as quickly as possible; "if there is any respectable mansion hereabouts, perhaps we could find accommodation for the night."

"Oh, no, no," answered the stranger briskly; "it is one of the worst places possible; all wretched hovels, and as for a gentleman's house there is not one within two leagues."

"Why," said Henry, who had recognised in the speaker an old acquaintance, and felt sure that he had good reasons for representing the case in the most convenient way for his own interest, "yonder is a pleasant château, where there must needs be good cheer, for I see smoke issuing

out of the chimneys. I propose that we all ride thither, and claim the hospitality of the host."

His friends were not a little surprised at this proposition, so contrary to all prudence; they whispered their advice, and asked his meaning.

"I have no such intention," said he, laughing, and speaking in the same key, "but this is old Nantouillet, whom we treated once so scurvily in Paris. It is so good a jest to frighten him a little that I cannot resist it; and he shall serve our purpose, also, never fear."

"Whose domicile is this that we are approaching?" he resumed to Nantouillet, for it was indeed no other, returning to his supper after a long day's ride, and hastening home to enjoy his warm chamber and repose, when he fell in with the fugitives.

"Where?" asked the ex-Prévôt, with a vacant air; "I see no house."

"How?" cried Henry, "not see yonder turretted mansion with its long pointed roofs? Why, man, the fire in the kitchen shines in your eyes at this moment."

"Oh, that!" returned Nantouillet, "how should I know? I am not of these parts, and not at all inquisitive."

"Well, then," said Henry, "as you are going our way you may as well be our guide to Chateauneuf. How fortunate that we met with you; come, you shall ride in the centre and be our director. It is rather provoking, though, to leave that good smoking supper yonder. I wager that the greedy old fellow of a citizen who lives there is just sitting down to his soup with great glee; I wish we had it instead of him."

"I wish *he* had it!" groaned the Prévôt inwardly; "but if I acknowledge the fact these cormorants will all go home with me, and quarter themselves on me for a month, perhaps,—and there's Clarice, much too pretty to be in their company: I can't make them quite out, but I suspect they are some of the rufflers of the army. I wish I could escape from them—it is biting cold; and to be compelled to go so far out of one's way, with a good hot comfortable supper all ready—is enough to make a saint swear!"

"Have you ever been in Paris, good sir?" asked Henry, who enjoyed the evident dilemma of his old friend.

"Paris!" replied he, "I have, indeed, and hope never to see it again. It is a fitting place only for thieves and villains."

"But the Court," persevered Henry, "tell us something of the Court; we are all country bred. They say the Court gentry are worth knowing."

"You talk like one who knows them not," answered Nantouillet; "I have seen a great deal too much of their tricks, and I tell you there 's not an honest man amongst them all. First, the King that now is, Henry the Third, he is a barber and perfumer — nothing more, except you add a canting monk spoiled; his brother, Anjou, is escaped at last, I am glad to hear — he was the best, but bad enough; and as for young Navarre ——"

"Ay, what of him?" asked D'Aubigné, enjoying the joke.

"Why, he 's a greater scapegrace than any of them in my mind, and a diable à quatre for a pretty face, — perhaps you 'll say that is no great crime; but his fault is that he has not a grain of spirit, except to get into street disturbances, and riots, and pillages; which a gentleman and a prince should be ashamed of. He promised better once; but he is to be bribed, they say, with the lieutenancy of the kingdom; and is content to lick the dust. I have no patience with him."

"What can he do?" said Henry quietly.

"Do!" said Nantouillet, — "fight his way through them all, as his father used: he would not have been mewed up thus, like a sick hawk, while there was game in the field. But the Queen-mother ties him to her by means of her petite bande. He had better look after his own wife, than think so much of other men's."

"Why, what have you to say against the young Queen?" asked Henry, — "no harm I hope."

"No good," returned the Prévôt; "and she is quite right to amuse herself with all her gallants since her husband neglects her; they say she changes her lovers as

she does her robes, every day. She is a lovely creature, and were she not her mother's daughter might have been fit for something."

In this kind of talk they rode on some miles; and when they arrived at Chateauneuf under his guidance, they paused before the gates, which were shut. On demanding admittance, it was at once refused; when D'Aubigné rode up to the officer on duty and spoke to him privately.

Meantime Henry turned to the Prévôt. "Well, Nantouillet," said he, "I thank you heartily, not only for the good guidance we owe you, but for your entertaining remarks of the Court."

"How! do you then know me?" said the Prévôt, in alarm:—"what, and who are you? if robbers I am able to defend myself, though against odds, and you may chance to repent having led me so far from home."

"It was a sorry trick, Prévôt," resumed Henry, "to deny us hospitality; we are more generous, and shall make you our guest to-night whether you will or no. You shall sup with us at Chateauneuf; methinks you like the *town* better than the *lady*."

"Ha!" cried Nantouillet, "who are you, young gallant, who know me so well? by your Gascon accent you should be one of Navarre's followers."

Here his conjectures were interrupted by a loud shout, and a cry of "Open the gates to Henry King of Navarre!" which echoed from mouth to mouth; and, to his inexpressible consternation, the companion of Nantouillet, spurring his horse, and casting the mantle from his shoulders, which had entirely covered his figure, rode foremost into the town, cap in hand, disclosing the features of Henry of Navarre.

The Prévôt, amidst the laughter and jeers of the party which followed, was made to enter with them, and share the triumph of the citizens, who hailed the fulfilment of their best hopes, and with enthusiastic greetings welcomed the Prince to their walls.

A merry supper succeeded, which Henry resolved to render so agreeable that Nantouillet should have no cause

to lament that which they had caused him to lose; and when they parted next day, it was with protestations of mutual forgiveness and friendship.

"Keep this ring, good Prévôt, for my sake," said Henry; "the Béarnois is poor now, but the day may come when he may have the power of naming a Prévôt of Paris; and none but Nantouillet shall be the man. The next time you give me a fête, depend on it I will order myself and my comrades more seemly, and your hospitality shall not be rewarded by riot and ill usage."

"Your Grace," cried the Prévôt, "may break every piece of furniture I have, then. I should not care if I made a bonfire of all my goods, so I could once see Henry of Navarre on the throne of France!"

"Treason! treason! good Prévôt," laughed Henry; "but I take your words as a good omen, — the stars may yet be propitious; and we may all meet again in more prosperous circumstances."

So saying, they parted. Nantouillet returned to his abandoned château, where he was well scolded by old Marion, whose cookery had been lavished in vain; and Henry of Navarre and his followers arrived safely at Alençon out of the reach of his enemies.

CHAPTER IX.

COURTLY MANNERS.

"We are shame-proof,
* * * *
The King and his company." — SHAKSPEARE.

When Henry the Third found that the King of Navarre had escaped in spite of all his vigilance, and that instead of deceiving he was himself deceived, he became almost frantic with rage.

"Marguerite is the traitress, the cause of all," cried he; "and I will make her repent it. She it was, I am convinced, who connived at my brother's flight, and now she has plotted for her husband. Fool that she is! I

have taken good care that they shall have no happiness together. He would scarcely believe my accounts of her other lovers, but Bussy d'Amboise he is positively jealous of; and nothing will convince him that he has not cause. You managed that, Du Guast, well."

"Yes," answered his favourite; "and La Torigni's dismissal; but I have not had my revenge sufficiently yet on that contemptuous damsel."

"Why not," replied the King. "I give you carte blanche for any thing you like. Invent some notable vengeance, and let us know of it when it is done; it will annoy Marguerite beyond all other things, for she doats on that woman. Meantime my treacherous sister shall be closely guarded, and kept here; for she is capable of conveying intelligence to either of the fugitives. See that she is closely confined to her apartments, and that no one has access to her."

Having given these orders, he sent for Montgaillard the Petit Feuillant, who was greatly in his favour at this period.

"Montgaillard," said Henry, "I send for you to express my thanks for the able manner in which you yesterday defended Holy Church against the attacks of the atheists, who I grieve to say abound in France. Your arguments were so sound and so good, that the most sceptical must acknowledge you proved the existence of a God in a manner not to be controverted."

"I am glad your Majesty thinks so," replied the coxcomb monk, who was perfectly aware of the hypocrisy of his master, and could not restrain the jest which rose to his lips; "but if it would give you pleasure I am ready, at any time, to prove, with equally good arguments, that all I said yesterday was false, and will engage to send away my congregation quite as much convinced on the other side of the question."*

"Silence!" said Henry, whose cue it was to be extremely pious that morning, "do not disturb my serious thoughts by your frivolity;—to-night, my dear friends," he continued, turning to the band of gentlemen who sur-

* Historical.

rounded him, and who were variously employed in different feminine occupations; one embroidering, another winding silk, and some stringing beads; "to-night we will have a few pleasant hours; first, the penitential procession by torch-light, — the music, I hear, is to be divine; it would have a good effect if some of you would administer to yourselves the discipline as we go along; the ignorant brutes of people have an idea that we are not religious — which the saints forbid should be true. I have ordered some large crosses of light wood, one of which I shall carry myself; and my great rosary of têtes-de-mort will, I think, tell. I must get money from these niggards by some means, and piety, I think, answers best. After the last procession I filled my coffers pretty well; and as De Joyeuse's wedding will cost me a round sum, some great effort must be made."

"I have ornamented these sandals with death's-heads, for your Majesty," replied Maugiron, who was busy with leather and ribbons; "you can walk barefooted in these admirably, without the skin of your delicate feet suffering. I shall paint a few drops of blood on the flesh-coloured stockings, which will produce much sympathy."

"The balconies will be full of heads to-night," said Quelus; "and we are well provided with dragées musquées to cast at the fair devotees who will be praying at their casements for the holy penitents. Your Majesty's whip will be the great attraction, methinks, on this occasion."

"Yes, — it is large and long, and shall hang conspicuously at my girdle," said Henry, laughing; "if it were not for the scandal that would ensue, what glorious delight it would be, in the midst of the procession, to turn upon the lazy monks and give them a taste of what real flogging is."

"Let us do it, sire, — let us do it!" cried twenty voices.

"Hold, madmen!" cried the Petit Feuillant, throwing himself into an attitude, "would you insult Holy Mother Church? would you give a handle to the heretics to call us heathens? — do not think of such a thing. Why,

the very last time we all walked in the procession of the Confrères Penitens, do you not recollect the distich which the insolents made on us, because we were caught in that furious rain which wetted us to the skin?"

"Repeat it — repeat it!" cried the King, who cared not for abuse, which he never intended should cause his amendment.

"This was the quatrain, may it please your Grace," replied Montgaillard,

"Aprés avoir pillé la France
Et tout le peuple despouillé
N'est-ce pas belle pénitence,
De se couvrir d'un sac mouillé?"

"Excellent!" cried Henry. "I wish it were true, but it is not so easy to despoil my loving subjects. I shall however do my best, for in spite of all the abuse directed against us, I find the processions impose on the people better than any other religious profession of fervour."

"I had a strange dream last night," suddenly exclaimed the King, starting up and changing the subject. "I thought all my lions and bears which I keep to be baited, suddenly set upon me, and the dogs as well tore and worried me to death. I cannot bear the recollection of this, and will be revenged on those brutes who caused me such terror. Chomberg, give orders that on our return to-night the beasts are driven into one cage, and let our arquebuses be prepared, we will all fire upon them; it will make a glorious massacre, almost equal to St. Bartholomew!" *

A shudder ran through the group, but no opposition was made to the inhuman order. St. Luc and Joyeuse whispered to each other, "The meaning of the dream is not difficult to interpret: he is eaten and torn to pieces by his vices; he carries things too far:—is all prepared for our scheme of reform? we must positively get Du Guast, and some of the rest away from him, or the respectability of the Court is at an end!"

Thus thought the two new favourites, whose morals were not a shade better than those they succeeded, but

* Historical.

who were disgusted with the weakness and cowardice displayed by many of the mignons who surrounded Henry, as, if they had any virtue, it might be bravery, of which they had given several striking proofs; and De Joyeuse, though the most expensive, yet was perhaps the least profligate of the worthless set who encouraged and fostered their master's weak and wicked habits.

At this moment D'Epernon was announced, bringing with him the Chevalier de Sure, grand Prior of Champagne, whom the King had desired to see.

"Oh, ho! Prior," cried Henry, without ceremony, "you are come, are you? how dare your attack my Intendant of Finance in the way you did lately?"

"May it please your Grace," said De Sure, boldly, "I spoke the truth, and had no intention of offering insult to you. I said, and I maintain it, that Milon has cheated the people who had consented to pay your Grace's debts. He represented that they amounted to the enormous sum of eight millions, and has taxed and distressed your subjects to obtain that money, knowing that the true amount is but five millions of crowns; your Majesty knows it is so."

"What should I know of such paltry distinctions?" said Henry, scornfully.

"It is not so, sire," replied De Sure, "it is a heavy burden on the people, who murmur loudly. I told Milon he was a villain, and fleeced the subjects of the King; I called him an assassin, and I gave him but his proper name. Place your hand on your heart, Sire, and answer if I spoke not the truth."

Fire flashed from Henry's eyes; he started up, overturning Maugiron and D'O, who sat at his feet.

"Slave! insolent ruffian!" cried he, "do you give me the lie?" and darting at De Sure, he gave him several furious cuffs in the face, and began kicking him with the rage of a boy entirely ungoverned in his passion.

"Sire, for the love of Heaven," cried D'Epernon and De Joyeuse, "consider your station, your position; the Prior may be in fault, but is this becoming punishment for a great prince to inflict? Calm yourself, De Sure;

depart instantly — stop not to parley. His Majesty will think better of this."

De Sure retired without loss of time, and the King sank exhausted with his exertions on a sofa, closing his eyes, and looking faint and overcome. Presently he raised his head, and appearing to recover himself, said, —

"You did right, De Joyeuse, to prevent my killing the insolent wretch; but he is an obstinate fool. Of course, I gave Milon my orders to call the five, eight; how else shall I furnish the expenses of your marriage with my wife's sister? Why will these idiots interfere with what does not concern them? Montgaillard, give me a lay; let us forget all these state affairs; D'O, hand him the lute, — something gay, I entreat."

The monk touched the lute with a practised hand; and, throwing back his robe gracefully, and turning up his eyes with an affected air, sang the following villanelle: —

IN PRAISE OF INCONSTANCY.

"I am not false, but if I were
All nature is as false as I —
Each object in earth, sea, or air,
Exists but in inconstancy,

"The gentle moon, that lovers hail,
To whom they mourn, and plead, and sigh,
Changes her features fair and frail,
A by-word of inconstancy.

"The breeze that through the garden roves
And woos each flow'r that blushes nigh,
Whisp'ring so fondly that he loves,
Is freighted with inconstancy.

"The wave that glitters to the shore,
Kissing the leaves, and murm'ring by,
Returns to those fair meads no more,
But wanders in inconstancy.

"'Tis true, in many star-like eyes,
I 've studied passion's alchemy,
But found, too soon, such lore supplies
But lessons of inconstancy.

"Sweet lady, then, reproach me not,
Is she not false, can'st thou deny —
Who makes all other loves forgot,
And teaches man inconstancy!"

After the song, Henry summoned to his presence a dwarf who had lately arrived from Nantes, and whose wonderful performances astonished the people of Paris.

He was without arms, yet could perform feats of delicate dexterity, which others in possession of all their limbs found infinite difficulty in doing. He could write, play at all games, draw the bow, load and fire a pistol, and perform various other wonders. His accomplishments were highly appreciated, and the King was so charmed that he took off a heavy gold chain from his neck, and wrote an order on his exhausted treasury for a hundred crowns to be paid immediately to a person possessed of qualities so valuable and useful.

CHAPTER XII.

The effect which the flight of Henry of Navarre had on the mind of the Queen-mother was different from that which the King experienced. She had discovered that the extreme unpopularity of her reigning son was increasing to a fearful extent, and the means she had thought good to keep him from attending to state affairs had only rendered him odious, and herself a stranger to his counsels. He had lately treated her with positive neglect, and thwarted her frequently at the very moment when she thought him most occupied with his pleasures. She saw that the Duke de Guise was the people's idol, and she regretted not having entered the party of the Duke of Anjou and the King of Navarre, in order to have a hold upon the nation; for that she was detested there was no kind of doubt. She heard of the successes of her younger son, and the friendly terms on which Elizabeth of England received him: she saw the throne of her ungrateful but favourite child tottering, and she resolved on conciliatory measures. When she found that Marguerite had been harshly treated by her brother, she was very much annoyed, and visited her immediately, hoping to soften the exasperated feelings which she knew would be engendered against him. So desolately wretched was poor Marguerite that this show of kindness was a comfort to her mind, and her tears flowed less painfully as she listened to her mother's jesuitical advice and consolation, who

interfered in her favour with the King, till awakening from the lethargy of indolence, folly, and passion, into which he had allowed himself to sink, he saw the necessity of once more putting himself under his mother's guidance. He therefore changed his conduct to his sister, and expecting more from her than she had the power to afford, loaded her with caresses and honour, and endeavoured to make her forget his late unkindness.

But it was not this alteration which had restored the heart of Marguerite to repose, and had caused the tears to dry in her eyes, and the roses to revisit her cheeks; she had received from her husband a letter full of tenderness, penitence, and affectionate regret. He reproached himself with his harshness and cruelty in having consented to order her friend La Torigni to be sent from her, and recounted an event which had just occurred, which seemed to have given him extreme delight, as he doubted not it would her.

The narrative which he related was as follows:—

"The poor, persecuted Gillone*, who had no fault but loving you, was living in her cousin Chastelas's house, and my little rival, your page, Endymion, whom I like extremely, was there also; ready to cause more scandal, if necessary, by his beaux yeux, without intending it. One night a party of mounted cavaliers arrived, and announced their errand as from the King, who, they said, had been unable to resist the tears of his sister, and had resolved to restore her favourite lady to her society. They desired him to tell Gillone to prepare herself, as a palfrey was in waiting for her; but no sooner had he admitted the ruffians than they rushed to her chamber, seized the trembling girl and bound her hand and foot; then locking the door, left her till they had partaken of the good cheer which they had forced Chastelas to prepare for them. They drank to excess, and in their cups proclaimed that their intention was to carry La Torigni to Du Guast, who was waiting near, who had resolved with his own hands to drown her in the river. Chastelas, on hearing this, was

* Mademoiselle De Torigni. This letter is historical.

in great terror and consternation, and supplied them with wine and food, hoping the good cheer would induce them to stay till daylight,—for it was a cold, damp night,—and that some succour might by that time arrive. Endymion, however, not trusting to that, had the presence of mind to let himself out by a back door, and, swimming the moat, for they had raised the drawbridge, ran as hard as he could in hopes of meeting some one to whom to tell the danger.

"It pleased God that La Ferté and Avantigny, the chamberlains of your brother François, were riding along on their way to join him and the army, when they met Endymion in this breathless state. A few words explained the fact; and they resolved to do you a service; and, knowing you had nothing more at heart than the release of poor Gillone, set spurs to their horses, and, guided by your page, reached the château just as the brutal party were issuing forth with her in their arms, and, having tied her on a horse, were setting forth towards the river. Drawing their swords, Anjou's party rushed upon them, La Ferté calling out 'Hold, murdering villains that you are!—If you harm her you are dead men!' They then charged the villains, and having punished several of them severely, rescued your pretty friend from their grasp, whom they brought away half-dead with fear and joy, having scattered her enemies like the wind. She is now with D'Anjou and myself, for I arrived soon after this event; and I assure you is treated with the same respect and kindness as if it was La belle Marguerite in person. She has told me many secrets which I was so dull as never to guess, and I rejoice to find that my most dangerous rival is myself. Ah! little traitress! why have you always shown me such coolness, and allowed your pride to chill the affection I was ready to give you? I trust we shall not mistake each other again. You must hasten to us, if possible. I am obliged to go into Guienne as speedily as I can, and Anjou is about to depart on his love adventure to England."

This account was most welcome, and the young Queen

determined that her spirits should not sink nor her courage fail her, trusting that she might not only be of use to her husband while she remained at Court, but be enabled to rejoin him before very long.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOVE-TREE.

"I've loved my last, and that love was my first." — SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

QUEEN ELIZABETH of England sat in a chamber of her palace at Greenwich, looking languidly on the sunset which illumined the waves of the river with gold and purple. Her thoughts were of the saddest kind: she was urged by an imaginary affection for the Duke of Anjou, to consent to the proposals made her by Simier, the minister whom he had sent to plead his cause; she was mortified at what he had disclosed to her of the Earl of Leicester's private marriage to the widow of the late Earl of Essex; she was annoyed at the opposition to her caprice shown by her Parliament, and her vanity was shocked at the home-truths delivered respecting her from the pulpit. It was true that the latter had been silenced by authority, but she felt that the general opinion, of which, with all her pride, no one stood more in awe, was against her. Her subjects, who, she always loved to believe considered her little less than a divinity, had dared to cavil at her decisions, to impugn her judgment, even to throw out hints that the maiden dignity, on which she prided herself, was giving way before a senseless attachment to a man twenty years her junior, a foreigner, and a Catholic. She had been obliged to repress these insults with a strong hand, to imprison the Earl of Leicester, who had breathed threats of vengeance against Simier, and had opposed her council every time they met.

The wit, accomplishments, and flattery of Simier had completely gained the Queen's confidence: she abandoned herself entirely to the delightful visions his persuasive

eloquence had conjured up. He represented the Prince as wasting away with a slow but sure disease, — the consequence of the adoration he felt for the loveliest of her sex, and the dread of never being able to gain her affections. Day after day, hour after hour, did Elizabeth sit alone with the accomplished courtier, listening to his tales of enchantment, and dreaming herself into Arcadia. Sometimes during these interviews she allowed the great painter, Zucchero, to take a sitting for the portrait she was having painted after her own taste, and the destination of which she refused to name when entreated to do so by the insinuating friend of Anjou.

"Ah!" said he, "I dare not permit myself to imagine that any Prince in Christendom can be so fortunate as one day to possess this lovely shadow, for, should I do so, I must picture a calamity to one whom I dearly prize, love, and honour. Were that image presented to any but the Duke, my master, your Majesty had better, if you have any pity or feeling left in your bosom, prepare a bier for the unhappy object of your scorn: he would never survive it. And yet my hopes revive, and daring wishes take possession of my breast, when I reflect that you have deigned to accept the very dress in which you allow that happy man, who is permitted to gaze on your beauty for hours together, to attempt to delineate features whose brightness dazzles and deludes the ordinary beholder! Stay, madam!—let me entreat, turn your head a little more towards that snowy shoulder!—Now, Zucchero! is it not perfection?"

The painter threw down his brushes in ecstacy.—"It is more than mortal!" cried he, in enthusiasm.—"I cannot paint if I am reminded of what I gaze on!—Let me go on in a rapturous dream of oblivion, and I may succeed; but if I am shown that the lovely statue before me can breathe, and move, and smile, I am undone!"

"My dear Lord!" exclaimed Elizabeth, "you will destroy my beloved painter; his enthusiasm for his art knows no bounds; and because I have some resemblance to a poetical dream of beauty he has formed, he looks upon

me as his property, and is jealous of the admiration of others."

"Then, madam," replied Simier, "he must perish; for to repress the admiration you inspire were to stop the course of nature."

"Do you like the design of the picture?" asked the Queen, smiling: "it is my own; this Persian dress suits my figure well, and therefore I chose it rather than the dress of the day, which confines the form too much. You see how well he has depicted the golden embroidery all over the loose robe,—the border of jewels, do not they sparkle brightly? The pearls which cover the shoes in this graceful pattern are precise,—he copies so exactly; look at the ropes of pearl about my neck, and the bracelets on my arm; are they not lucid?"

"Exquisite!" said the courtier; "but the small, delicate foot, the white, little, tiny hand, covered with rings, and the snowy throat and bosom, over which the golden tresses play like threads drawn from the sun-beams! the graceful shape, the winning smile, yet it is pensive too—that gentle countenance and those radiant eyes are full of thought!"

"Do you observe," said the Queen, "that I am standing in a forest of flourishing trees; and, behold, on every bough are billing pairs of happy birds?"

"Happy! ah, you say well, enchantress!" whispered Simier, "would that your thought were not mere fancy!"

"And see, I rest my arm upon the neck of a fair hart, whom I have crowned with flowers. Does the allegory please you, my Lord?" added Elizabeth playfully.

"It will well please him who is deemed worthy by the goddess of those shades to unriddle it. Alas!" cried Simier apparently rapt, "why is the success I have so striven for, the cause of pangs like these? My heart is too full,—pardon me, gracious, and too fatally fair Queen——" His words died away, and he appeared fainting from emotion. Elizabeth seemed affected, and, hastening to him, with her own hands untied the ribbon which confined his ruff, and taking it off bared his handsome throat, while the painter busied himself in throwing open the casement.

"Alas!" exclaimed Elizabeth, "it is always thus. It were better to be a homely peasant girl, than thus to cause the grief of all who approach me!"

Simier breathed. "Where am I?" he cried, as if bewildered; "he comes! he is here—at her feet! Betrayer that I am! I dared to love that——"

"Go, Frederigo, my good friend," said Elizabeth hastily to the painter; "our sitting is disturbed to-day,—to-morrow we will resume it; go at once."

Zucchero bowed, and retired with an aspect of profound sympathy. As he left the chamber his countenance changed, and a sneer of contempt curled his features. "Vain fool!" said he mentally, "what an ungrateful labour it is throw away my art, my genius, on such a face! Were she content to appear as she is, full of masculine decision, power, cunning, and shrewdness, I could make a picture which the world would admire for its character; but she will be a languishing beauty; her hard features must be softened into tenderness, her sallow complexion rendered transparent, the fierceness of her subtle eye quelled into sentimental languishment; pshaw! it sickens me! I, who have sighed indeed over the loveliness of the angelic Stuart, whose pictured self will one day, I trust, tell the world what angel visited this sphere. I will go home and gaze on her features, retouch that miracle of art, and forget the task which gold *alone* will pay."

When Zucchero was gone, it was time for the crafty courtier to recover himself: he accordingly did so; and throwing himself at her feet, poured out a rhapsody, in which love, admiration, duty, wretchedness, and resignation appeared to be mixed. He clothed his apparently wild declaration in language most poetical,— made numerous classical allusions, and ending by entreating, first, to be pierced by her hand to the heart for his presumption, next to be forgiven for the sake of his master.

"Moved to tears by this successful acting, the vain woman raised him from the ground, affected disdain, anger, pity, and compassion, as well as he could himself have done; and, after this fantastic display of feelings, which were never, with her, more than the mere semblance of

reality, she dismissed him, well content with the scene, and excited by its novelty and apparent truth.

"Poor Simier!—he really loves me!" said she; "how dangerous an ambassador of love has the Prince chosen! Mary Stuart may boast her lovers; but was Chatelar, was Rizzio more enamoured than this unhappy man?"

When Simier reached his own apartments he cast himself upon a seat, and indulged in a long burst of suppressed laughter; he dared not disclose to any his real feelings, as the great end hung on a thread; and he dreaded that the very figures of the tapestry should report his thoughts.

"If Anjou arrive not," said he, "the farce will have a sudden ending; I can carry it no further: her egregious vanity makes her believe anything, though I feared I had gone too far. This untoward wind delays him strangely; he should be arrived by this. I think all promises well; she will doat on him, and may on me too, if she pleases; and we shall have store of gold to send to France, and make us forget our long privations."

He was interrupted by a stir without, and a page, rushing in, informed him that the expected arrival had taken place,—the Duke of Anjou was just landing. Simier lost no time in hurrying down to the shore to welcome the disguised Prince, who came in secret to visit his intended bride; and, tired of long and changeful negotiations, resolved to put himself out of suspense at once, and carry the Queen's consent by a coup de main.

Surprised, gratified, flattered and delighted, at this bold proceeding, Elizabeth, though at first she assumed coyness, ended by acknowledging the pleasure his presence gave her; and now, as if she had at once taken leave of all the prudence, wisdom, and policy which had distinguished her as eminent amongst the monarchs of Europe for so many years, she abandoned herself to the childish amusement of a new attachment, and, it appeared, acted it so well that her heart was actually entangled, and every day the web seemed growing stronger round the captive.*

She had already given the Duke the sum of four

* See for a full detail of Elizabeth's weakness, Lingard's History of her time.

hundred thousand crowns, in support of his pretensions to the sovereignty of Flanders, forgetting at the moment that in case of his success she should be involved in a war with the King of Spain ; this, however, her council were not slow in reminding her of, and their representations, reproaches, and entreaties, distracted her. In the midst of the conference she burst into tears.

" I was, indeed, simple," said she, " to confide so delicate a matter to such counsellors. I vainly expected that, instead of this opposition, I should have met with petitions that I should marry. How often have I been importuned upon the subject!—and now that I have fixed upon one, in merit far beyond all the suitors who have aspired to please me, I am treated with indignity, and refused consent, as if I were a child who asked for a toy!"

" Not so, your Majesty," replied Sadler ; " your faithful subjects have long desired that your fair hand should be bestowed on one worthy of your exalted virtues, but we deemed not that it could ever enter into your mind to choose a Catholic. Consider the offence to God, if he were permitted to have the mass celebrated on our very hearth."

Elizabeth started, but her brow grew sterner as he went on. " Consider the age at which your Majesty is arrived, and the youth of him you honour with your regard ; consider the probability of a young husband forgetting his duty to a wife so much his senior—"

" I will hear no more," she exclaimed imperiously ; " you insult and torture, instead of advising me. Depart, I command you, and when my mind is more composed and able to endure better, I will require your presence again."

Furious was her passion, and unrestrained her invectives, against those she considered inimical to her marriage ; for several hours her anger was so great that she refused to admit any one, and feeling that in this state she would scarcely appear to advantage in the eyes of her lover, she declined seeing him till she had recovered some degree of calmness.

When her irritation was sufficiently subsided to make

her emotion appear only becoming, she allowed Anjou to visit her, and permitted him to behold her in a negligent dishabille, her hair flowing about her shoulders, her tears streaming plenteously, and her whole appearance bespeaking despair and tender regret.

"Alas, François," she said, as he fell at her feet and clasped her hands, entreating to know the cause of her distress: "I am thwarted, shocked, insulted by my people, whose jealous attachment cannot brook resigning me to a husband. My own feelings I do not attempt to conceal from you, but I fear I must submit to the popular will."

"Say not so, adored and loveliest of thy sex," exclaimed the Duke, trembling for all his plans of aggrandisement, as the thought flashed rapidly over his mind of the expectations her promises had raised in France; "consign me not to despair. I will not survive this misfortune! pronounce the word that you reject me, and behold a victim at your feet!"

"Hold! dear, generous, best of men;" screamed Elizabeth, as the Prince drew his dagger; "think not the love I have confessed to you is weakened; think not that my heart is influenced by the harshness of my ministers; no, you are still the object of my choice, you are my first, my only loved."

"Rapturous confession!" cried the Prince, whose mind saw all the golden pageants returning in triumph, and his ambition crowned; "give me then proof of what you say; bestow on me a pledge of your sincerity, and let me treasure it for ever!"

"Behold!" said she, "I had prepared a proof of my true regard for you: take this paper, and see how your interests are considered."

He ran his eye hastily over the scroll, and found that it contained a promise to look upon his enemies as her own; to assist him in all his necessities, and not to treat with any power until she had first consulted with him.

She required him to give her a similar promise, to which he readily agreed: and then, placing on his finger a ring, she bade him consider her as his affianced wife.

There was no lack of protestations, flattery, and vows

of attachment on his part, and he now looked upon his success as certain.

Elizabeth summoned the Bishops and the Lords, and required their signature to a paper regulating the rites to be observed on her marriage, which she announced should take place in a few weeks. Expresses were sent off to France and to the States: and the union, as if it had already taken place, was forthwith celebrated at Bruxelles with fireworks, discharges of artillery, and every demonstration of joy.

But, although overpowered by the Queen's vehemence, her council had appeared to give their sanction to this measure, they were far from intending to allow it to succeed.

Elizabeth on retiring one night to her chamber, was assailed by the clamorous sorrow of her female attendants; all that could be thought and invented by female ingenuity was put in force to change her resolution; arguments against the wisdom of choosing so young and inconstant a husband; protestations against his religion; recapitulations of the acts of St. Bartholomew; and the numerous plots discovered as having been formed to betray and destroy her by Catholic traitors;—all were employed, and the Queen found herself in a situation of peculiar embarrassment and annoyance.

On every side remonstrances were poured in; her dignity, her modesty, her sense were impeached; and, tortured and distressed, Elizabeth began to awaken to the necessity of yielding.

A scene of grief on her part, and disappointed ambition which took the semblance of sorrow on his, took place between the Queen and the Duke; she professed undiminished affection, but pleaded the obligation of obedience to the wishes of her poople. He implored and entreated, but she had taken care that they should not be alone, fearing that she would be overcome by his despair; and her Lords coming to her assistance represented that the answer of the King of France not having yet arrived, delay, at least, was necessary.

The Duke retired to his apartments, and there, throwing

the ring from him which the Queen had given him, declared that the women of England were as capricious and changeable as their uncertain climate. He resolved instantly to depart, but, on sending to Elizabeth to demand leave to retire, she fell into a state of the greatest grief, and condescended to entreat him to remain,—assuring him that if he would delay, all would end according to their desire. She resolved to give fêtes, tournaments,—all that could amuse and detain him,—and thus, for some time, he lingered on, till the country became impatient and indignant; scandalous stories began to be set on foot, libellous pamphlets circulated, and the whole face of affairs confused and disturbed.

At length it became absolutely necessary that Anjou should depart, and as he was quite wearied with the alternation of his fortunes, he was most anxious to do so. Elizabeth accompanied him as far as Canterbury, and had insisted that a gorgeous train of nobles and knights should attend him beyond sea, as far as Bruxelles. They parted with sighs and tears, and mutual vows; he to resume the stirring life he loved to lead, and she to shun all the haunts which reminded her of him whom she had so much loved.

The picture which Zucchero had begun under such favourable auspices for her content was finished, but a change had come over it: the pensive expression of the countenance was much deepened, a gloom was given to the background of wood, the azure of the sky was clouded, some swallows, birds of fleeting sojourn, were added to the others, and, graved on the bark of the tree, beneath which the fair Persian stood, were seen mysterious sentences, expressive of her disappointed hope.

It was said that her own hands traced the lines in gold, which appear on that singular picture, which had long been concealed in the ruinous gallery at Kensington, and may now be recognised by the curious at Hampton Court. There can be read the Latin sentences with which the love-sick pedant covered the canvass; and on a shield in the foreground are conspicuous the following quaint and melancholy lines, in which too much clearness is evidently purposely avoided:—

" The restlesse swallow fits my restlesse minde,
In still revivinge, still renewinge wrongs,
Her just complaintes for crueltie unkinde
Are all the musique that my life prolonges.
With pensive thoughts my weeping stag I crown,
Whose melancholic teares my cares expresse,—
His teares in silence and my sighs unknowne
Are all the physick that my harmes redresse.
My onely hope was in this goodly tree,
Which I did plant in love, bring up in care,
But all in vaine, for now too late I see
The shales * be mine, the kernels others' are!
My musique may be plaintes, my physick teares,
If this be all the fruit my love-tree bears!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ACCUSED.

" I apprehend thee as a felon here!"—SHAKSPEARE.

THE President Bailly after the departure of René Bianco, had leisure to reflect on many circumstances from which he had endeavoured carefully to lead his thoughts. Alix, in all her innocence and affection, was present to his mind. No longer influenced by the artful insinuations of the Italian, all that had appeared faulty in her conduct, he reflected might be the effect of the strange and untoward circumstances in which she was placed; and his musings led him to frame excuses for her, and to sigh over their long separation.

He was in this frame of mind one morning when he left his chamber, after a sleepless night, and his natural coldness was subdued when he observed that Marcel was placing flowers in all directions in the study he was accustomed to occupy.

" What means this?" asked he, in a subdued voice.

"I have not forgotten, though others may," answered Marcel sharply, " that this day is the birthday of Mademoiselle Alix; and I do not see why the only child of my master should be looked upon as if she were dead and gone."

" She is dead to me, Marcel," said the President, sadly;

* Shells.

"she has never sought my pardon, nor striven to return to me."

"Are you sure of that, sir?" inquired Marcel: "or is there any one interested in making you believe so, who has so reported?"

"Whom do you mean, Marcel?" said Bailly. "Your words seem to have some allusion. I give you leave to speak out."

"Then," returned Marcel, "I will tell you at once, that you give too much credit to the tales of that Italian, of whom we are for the present well rid. He tells you that Mademoiselle Alix has never written to you, which I do not believe, for a good reason. You must know, that going one day into his room, I saw him reading letters attentively; he was in the act of burning several as I entered, and had thrust one, which was torn, under the embers, and thought it was burnt. I confess I was curious to know what he was so full of; and when he was gone I returned to his room, and, sure enough, a piece of the paper was still untouched by the flame. Here it is, and in my mind is your daughter's handwriting; or else I learnt with the monks of St. Germain when a boy for nothing."

So saying he produced the slip of half-burnt paper, which Bailly took with a trembling hand, and read the few words which it contained with emotion.

"BELOVED FATHER.—Night and day I pray to kneel once more at your feet and kiss your dear hand * * * my numerous letters unnoticed * * * my brave and worthy husband * * * saved the life of your persecuted child * * * my uncle, De Hommet * * *"

"It is so, indeed, Marcel!" said the President. "I have been grossly abused; my poor Alix! how shall I repair this error? René is a dangerous and deceitful man? I have been strangely fascinated by him, but I will cast off this spell and do justice to my suffering child."

"Then," said Marcel, "never suffer Bianco to re-enter your doors, and write at once to Mademoiselle if you know where she is."

"She is at La Rochelle," replied the agitated father; "there is a truce between the parties at this moment.

Why not seek her there myself? Doubtless she is protected by De Hommet, her poor mother's brother, and all will be explained. Prepare, Marcel, that we set out without delay, before the return, which I daily expect, of René. I know not why I feel so much in the power of that man; it is only in his absence that I breathe freely, and dare to think for myself."

Marcel, with eager delight, received this command, and resolved that no time should be lost by the President in commencing his journey, which it was agreed should be the next morning; but scarcely had Marcel quitted his master when, to his infinite vexation and terror, he beheld the unwelcome form of René Bianco himself approaching the house from the avenue which communicated with the Abbey.

The President was no less annoyed to see his intrusive visitor returned, and the reception he was able to give him was so constrained and cold, that René saw at once something had occurred inimical to his interests: however, he carried off his uneasiness with a show of carelessness; told numerous anecdotes of the Court; related circumstances of the new King's coronation and marriage; and, by his wit and lively conversation, contrived, according to his usual custom, to interest and please the President in spite of himself.

They were walking that afternoon in the Abbey garden when Marcel approached his master, and delivered a slip of paper, which Bailly, with some confusion, read instantly, and thrust into his bosom. The words which had caused his emotion were these—"one from La Rochelle would speak with the President Bailly."

René, suspiciously alive to art in others, saw that there was some mystery which was not to be explained to him: and his fears and his conscience alike pointed to Alix and Claude. The President, however, continued his walk, and talked as before on indifferent subjects, nor did they part till the usual time—René to his chamber, and the President to the chapel of the Abbey, where his nightly prayers were said;—after which he returned to his study, and received from Marcel a letter which the messenger,

who had entreated to see him, wished that he should first read.

It was that which Alix had written in which she expressed her fears that he had been prevented from receiving her former appeals; conjured him to listen to her prayers, and to pardon the steps she had taken; related her escapes and dangers, and finally referred him to the bearer of the letter, whom she feared to name lest danger might reach her husband.

Bailly was deeply affected, and all his pride and anger melted away as he dwelt upon her eloquent words. He had, without René's perceiving it, given orders to Marcel to conceal the messenger in the Abbey till night; and as he was a mendicant friar, there was little difficulty in doing so without creating suspicion.

He was now conducted by Marcel to the President's study, and left with him alone; but the curiosity of the old servant was not to be repressed, and he resolved to inform himself of the secret, which all his endeavours had failed to draw from the friar, who professed to be ignorant of the contents of the missive which had been intrusted to his care.

Stationing himself, therefore, in a corridor which led to the sleeping room of his master, he applied his ear to an opening in the wainscot, and found that he could hear the whole of the conversation which ensued between the parties within, and occasionally shifting his position could see them also. He thus became a witness of the interview between Claude and his father-in-law, and learnt all the particulars which he wished to know.

The President, when Claude kneeling at his feet made himself known as the husband of his daughter, was at first cold and haughty, and expressed himself in angry and offended terms, reproaching him with treachery, and treating him as a menial and dependant unworthy of the alliance he had made. Claude, although he could boast of neither power nor riches that might cause Bailly to receive him less harshly as his son, yet recounted the untoward circumstances of his birth with eloquence so moving, pleaded his affection for Alix, and expressed so much disinterested

generosity, that the worldly man was subdued into the father, and all the kinder feelings of his nature took their turn.

"I had already purposed," said he, "to set forth to La Rochelle to see my child. I have been deceived too readily. René Bianco unfortunately returned this very day, doubtless with a view of continuing the plans which he has already found too successful. Be of good cheer, however; return to my dear child — tell her I will not delay to visit her, and, above all, assure her of my blessing and forgiveness. For you, young man, your misfortunes and your generous devotion to my child claim my pity and my gratitude. Marcel will see you safely lodged; I would not have you encounter your arch foe, of whom I will rid myself before many days are past. Depart, therefore, by day-break. I shall write to my beloved Alix, and Marcel will bring my letter to you before René is stirring. Go, and my blessing attend you!"

Claude, with tears of grateful acknowledgment, knelt to receive the benediction of his father-in-law, and Marcel, whose vicinity was not suspected, was summoned to reconduct him to his cell for the night. Arrived there the heart of the old servant overflowed, and he proclaimed to the young secretary that he was known; entreated to hear of his dear mistress, overwhelmed him with blessings and inquiries, and did not leave him till the sun's first rays told them that the hour was come for Claude to depart. Marcel therefore, with reluctant step, proceeded to his master's chamber, for the letter which was to carry joy and content to the heart of Alix, and her husband descended into the convent-garden to await his return.

Meanwhile, the reflections of Bianco, on retiring to his chamber, were of the most perplexed description. He saw that his absence had ruined his cause with Bailly, that he had, without doubt, received intelligence from his daughter, and discovered the deceit which had been practised on him.

Catherine was impatient for his return, and he could not recommence the machinations which in an unforeseen moment were at once destroyed. The will of Bailly would

confirm him heir to large possessions, and he should be able to compete with Ruggieri in station, as the superior of an abbey.

All these thoughts tended to one end, and his half-formed intention of sacrificing the life of his confiding friend took a more tangible shape. Why, he asked himself, should he hesitate? even should the murder be brought home to him, his royal protectress was sufficiently powerful to screen him from punishment, and the laws were in a state that favoured the escape of the powerful, however guilty. The temporary remorse which had been awakened in his breast at the success of his last crime had speedily been effaced, and his usual indifference had returned.

Fatigued with his journey, he had at first thrown himself upon his bed to rest; but all these thoughts rising in his bosom roused him to the necessity of immediate action. He resolved to see Bailly, and to intimidate him into the signature of a paper which he had prepared, bequeathing him all his property, and excluding his daughter altogether.

"If he refuses," said he, "I will at once take my revenge; and the will which he has already made remains in my favour as before. Once secure of this, I will not wait long, so that he is my victim at all events; and a part, or the whole of his wealth, which I know is more considerable than the world supposes, will be transferred to me."

He uttered these remarks mentally, as with a cautious step, he descended the stair which led to the President's study. Bailly was still there; he sat with a great many papers scattered about the table before him, and was re-perusing the letter of Alix, while the tears ran down his cheeks. Suddenly he looked up, and beheld before him René Bianco.

"Why are you here?" he asked abruptly; "can I have no privacy in my own house?"

"I sought you, Bailly," answered the Italian, "to inquire the meaning of your late conduct. You could not deceive me; I am an unwelcome guest, and some occurrence has changed your feelings towards me. I do not deserve this, and require an explanation."

"The letter I hold in my hand," said Bailly, "is ex-

planation sufficient; it is from my daughter, whose appeals to me you have hitherto suppressed. Bianco, I can be deceived no longer; your treachery is revealed,—let us part at once, and for ever. The will which you induced me to make I have destroyed; yonder fire has cancelled my injustice to my child."

René approached closer to the President; as he spoke his eyes flashed fire, and he met the stern glance of Bailly with a malignant sneer.

"This sounds well, President," said he, "but can you suppose that my measures are to be so easily thwarted as this? I have your promise, and you shall abide by it. You see this paper; it requires only a signature, which you can place at once, and we are again friends; refuse it and you have me for a foe. I have seldom proved myself a safe one."

Bailly rose, with indignation in his countenance, and replied:

"How long is it since a man of my station and years has been compelled to do that against which his will revolts? Away, deceiver! I scorn and spurn you!"

Before he had time to utter another word, the fierce Italian had grappled with him. Unprepared for so sudden an attack, Bailly was entirely off his guard, and was thrown violently on the floor; while René, drawing a small dagger from his girdle, held it menacingly over him.

"Your life is in my hands," said he; "sign the paper as I demand, or this is your last moment of existence."

"I will not sign away my child's inheritance," cried Bailly, struggling.

"Then die, base miser!" cried René, "and leave me that daughter as a hostage of revenge."

He struck—his aim was too true, and his hand too well practised; his dagger was one prepared by his own skill, and carried with it a certainty of death. The President uttered one groan, and fell back a corpse.

Bianco rose,—gazed at the prostrate form one minute with a scowl of gratified hatred, and, spurning it from him with contempt, quitted the chamber with a firm step.

Daylight was just dawning, and he descended into the

convent-garden to seek the stables, where he purposed to mount his horse and commence an immediate flight. He was certain that the confusion attendant on the discovery of the abbot's death would prevent the monks and villagers from taking any very prompt measures, and he calculated on the probability of his reaching Paris, and his sanctuary in the Louvre, before any steps could be taken which he could not guard against.

As he hurried along he beheld before him in the avenue a friar, whom he at once recognised as not being of the community, who, as he approached, seemed to retire from observation. A sudden thought struck him,—should this be a secret agent of Alix? He turned down a path which he knew must lead him so as to meet the stranger who avoided him; and by doing so, as he expected, came full in front of him he sought before there was time for concealing his face: both started,—and both at the same moment placed their hands in their girdles, for Claude was not unarmed, and René had replaced the fatal weapon in its sheath with which he had stabbed Bailly.

"We are well met once again!" cried the Italian. "I have sought you long, and could not find you more opportunely."

"I am prepared in meeting you," answered Claude, "to behold a foe, and shun him as I would an adder in my path."

"That is less easy than you imagine, Count Gabriel de Montgomery," cried René, sneeringly. "Let me be the first to call you by your title: it must be pleasant to your ears."

"It is so," replied Claude, calmly. "I would rather another than the worst foe I have had called me by my name; but I expected not the courtesy from you."

"Idiot!" returned René, "I could have told you this long since, and told you too who gave the wound by which I recognised you; when the secret of your chain, fabricated by my own hands, revealed to me who you were. I sought your life when an infant, and failed; your star triumphs over my *hand*, but my *mind* still sways you,—you shall be my victim still."

At that moment cries were heard issuing from the house and a party of vignerons who were passing near, attracted by them, had joined several domestics who, with terror in their countenances, were hurrying towards the spot where René stood with Claude.

Suddenly making a spring at Claude, the Italian strove to detain him, but, aware of his ill intents, the former was on his guard. Not knowing what might be the cause of the disturbance, and fearing that some discovery might betray the interests of the public cause, as well as his private affairs, Claude thought it better to fly, and as he did so, dashing René from him, he heard the Italian call with a loud voice,—

"Behold the murderer! — Stop —seize the assassin of the President Bailly!"

The crowd had by this time come up, and as the avenues of the garden were unknown to him, Claude found his chance of escape by flight impossible. The startling words rang in his ears like a knell. Bailly assassinated!—and who the murderer? The question was easily answered in his mind, but the stunning horror of the fact remained. Bewildered and uncertain he rushed onwards, when, turning suddenly down a wooded path, he found himself surrounded and seized upon by the shouting villagers, and dragged with angry vehemence towards the gates of the Abbey.

"He is the Huguenot secretary of the President who ran away with his daughter; he came in disguise, and has murdered his master," was echoed from mouth to mouth.

In vain did Claude entreat to be heard; René had excited the indignation of the people by his plausible story. Bailly had been found dead in his study, stabbed by an unknown hand, his papers in confusion, and the assassin fled. René represented himself as having, on entering a few moments before, seen the murderer attempting to escape; had pursued, overtaken, and was struggling with him when the rest came up. Marcel's cries on finding his master dead had roused the household; and so great was his grief and consternation that he had fallen senseless beside the corpse, and lay there still, while the others had hurried to the spot where René had secured the supposed

friar. To the simple peasants the mere name of Huguenot suggested ideas of magic and evil deeds, nor did it the more recommend the unfortunate prisoner to the mercy of the monks, whom the terrible report of the death of their Abbot had called in troops from their cells.

Every convent was provided with dungeons, and though the simple character of the neighbourhood, and the quiet habits of the monks of Bourgueil, did not offer much opportunity or occasion for severity, yet the Abbey was not unprovided with a place of security in which to detain offenders. So monstrous a crime as this laid to the charge of Claude had never been committed in this part of the country, and the religious fraternity would have found themselves at a great loss how to act, but for the advice and directions of René Bianco, who undertook to regulate every step necessary to be taken in the matter.

Fortunately for his purpose, there had just arrived at the monastery one of those emissaries from Rome which the holy father had sent to join le Frère Pacifique, a celebrated Capuchin monk, whose zeal had greatly distinguished him in the cause of the Church. The heads of the Catholic religion in Italy and Spain, alarmed at the spread of Protestantism, had united their strength to crush the growing evil, and had sent preaching brothers to France, charged to exert to the utmost their powers of persuasion and exhortation to bring the stray sheep once more into the fold.

Catherine de Medicis had promised her aid in the holy cause, and offered every encouragement to the establishment of new convents in Paris and throughout France, where stricter rules should be observed and a more severe jurisdiction held. She had obtained for the frères mineurs of Picpus the grant of a piece of land in the Faubourg St. Honoré, where le Frère Pacifique was now established, and his convent rapidly increasing. The extreme severity and zeal displayed by these Capuchins alarmed the less austere monasteries, and they dreaded the visits and inquiries of their strict and uncompromising brethren.

It was, therefore, an event which had considerably disturbed the indolent quietude of the good brothers of

Bourgueil when the envoy, Père Pierre, made his appearance amongst them; and as he had found much to cavil at in their establishment, they were particularly distressed that so appalling an occurrence as the murder of their superior, although a layman, should have furnished such an ample field for censure.

With the utmost zeal, therefore, they resolved to exhibit their horror of the crime that had been committed, and resent the disgrace brought on their community.

To listen to protestations of innocence from one who was a known heretic and schismatic was out of the question, and the testimony of René, the bosom friend of the murdered man, was heard with all due attention. Marcel, on recovering from the shock he had received, had in vain asserted the innocence of Claude, protesting that he could clear him of the charge, and prove that he had remained in his company to the last moment, and that on quitting him he went straight to the President's chamber, where he discovered him lying murdered. René had taken care so to represent the case, that he was looked upon as a friend of the accused, and desirous to screen him from punishment, and so artfully did he contend against the truth that Marcel's entreaties and assertions were treated with contempt.

Claude was dragged before a tribunal hastily assembled, at which Père Pierre presided. He was not permitted to utter a word in his own defence, and ordered to be confined, during the necessary deliberation, in the prison of the Convent.

"This case," said Père Pierre, "is one of great turpitude, and shall be brought forward as an example. This wretch shall be conducted to Paris and examined, and a public example made, capable of edifying all good Catholics and just men."

It was accordingly agreed that instead of the prisoner being taken to Angers to be tried, he should be placed in proper custody, and accompanied by René and Père Pierre himself, — who was on his return to his convent, — together with all the necessary witnesses, should forthwith

be transferred to the capital, there to abide by the judgment of the law.

"This, my good friend, Bianco," said Père Pierre to the Florentine, when they were left alone together that night,—"this is a fortunate meeting. Your numerous letters have given great satisfaction to the Holy Father; and he charged me, when I left Rome, from whence I only now return, to express to you his sense of the services rendered by you to our sacred cause, from time to time."

"I think the Pope will be still more satisfied," replied René, "when he finds that the long-coveted treasure, the cross of the Sainte Chapelle, containing an inestimable piece of sacred wood itself, is relinquished to his Holiness. Some pious friends of mine are at this moment conducting it to its destination, and it will doubtless be received with joy."

"This is, indeed, blessed news!" exclaimed the Capuchin; "and the service will not be forgotten by the Pope. Whatever, in his name, I can do to serve you, you may command."

"I shall be grateful for your testimony in the affair," said René, "of this guilty heretic, with whom I think it better that we should set out without loss of time."

No objection was made to this proposal, and steps were immediately taken to put it in execution, when René found to his mortification that Marcel was no where to be found.

Meantime, the victim of all this villany was languishing in the prison to which he had been consigned. The grief of Alix for her father's loss, her terror, her despair at his being the object of so dreadful an accusation,—the dangerous situation in which he stood, all these thoughts crowded on his mind and almost overwhelmed him by their bitterness. The probability of René being himself the murderer was evident to his mind, and increased, if possible, the agony he felt.

While plunged in these reflections a slight noise in a corner of his prison aroused his attention, and groping in the gloom with his manacled hands he endeavoured to

discover what had caused it. There was a moment's pause, when the noise was resumed, and appeared like one trying to make an aperture in the wall above. He looked up, and by the feeble ray of a small opening in the upper part of the cell, he saw a hand busily employed in removing some bricks, which, being cleared away cautiously, he distinguished through the rugged opening a face which he recognised as that of the faithful Marcel, who, placing his lips close to the aperture, in a low voice called to him. The height of the narrow cell, which appeared as if it had been a division between two walls, closed in about half-way up, with a loop-hole that admitted the light at the top, made it at first difficult for him to catch a sound. These words, however, at length reached him:—"I am Marcel—trust me!"—at the same time a small cord let down to him a piece of parchment and an inkhorn, such as was generally used by the monks. Claude seized it with avidity, and traced these words—"To JULES BELCASTEL at La Rochelle.—Fly to my rescue!—I am accused of murder; in the power of René!—CLAUDE."

He hastily fastened this scroll to the cord, and, with an imploring action, gazed upwards towards the friendly face which watched his movements. The finger on the lip warned him to repress the exclamations of gratitude which rose to his tongue, and the cord rapidly ascending his mysterious friend disappeared, the bricks were replaced, and he was again alone.

But short time was allowed him to brood over his misfortunes, for he was soon disturbed by his jailors and hurried away from his cell, loaded heavily with irons, and placed in a conveyance, accompanied by a military escort. He was prevented speaking, and every endeavour to excite sympathy or attention was vain. In this manner he continued his way, which by its length Claude could not but consider was directed to Paris, where he doubted not that he was to be brought to trial.

After a fatiguing and miserable journey he found his surmises verified, and that his destination led him to a dungeon in the prison of the Conciergerie.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONDEMNATION.

"Is this proceeding just and honourable?" — SHAKSPEARE.

SUCH was the deplorable state of the laws in France at this period that every sort of injustice was committed with impunity. The question of the length of a monk's beard, or whether it was proper that he should wear one at all, occupied the time of the gravest assemblies, while the investigation of an event which involved the lives and properties of innocent persons was negligently performed, or the cause altogether abandoned to chance, as it suited the convenience or caprice of the judges.

Vain were the remonstrances of the people, vain their appeals to the King, who, given up entirely to his pleasures, laughed at the petitions which poured in upon him continually.

The representations of Père Pierre tended to prejudice the judges against the Huguenot accused: and as no person of rank and power came forward to offer bribes or menaces in order to procure his enlargement, the unfortunate son of Montgomery seemed abandoned to his fate.

René appeared as the accuser, and several monks and domestics gave their evidence respecting Claude's mysterious visit: his disguise as a mendicant friar, and numerous other particulars, made the case appear very strong against him.

René exerted every nerve, and all his eloquence was called into action to induce the venal judges to condemn him.

"The prisoner is," said René, "a discarded servant of the late President, expelled his house in consequence of presumptuously raising his views to his patron's daughter. He carried his evil designs so far that, by means of spells and charms, known to those of his accursed religion, he contrived to obtain her affections, seduced her from her father's house, abandoned her among strangers, and com-

ing concealed to the peaceful retreat of the disconsolate old man, completed his villany by murder. Can there be wickedness greater than this? Can there be sorrow deeper than mine, who was the friend of Bailly, and the betrothed of his daughter?"

The murmurs of the Court became loud and indignant, and not without the utmost difficulty did Claude at last obtain a hearing. He stated as clearly as possible the reasons which induced him to visit Bailly, their interview and parting.

"The servant who introduced him to his victim," exclaimed René, "has absconded: he was doubtless an accomplice. Unfortunately he has escaped the search made for him; but his absence proves his guilt, and further evidence is unnecessary."

In fine, the judges, swayed by the arguments of René and little disposed to show mercy, were induced to deliver an iniquitous sentence, which, without further investigation, condemned Claude, as guilty of the murder, to suffer death. In vain did he entreat that time might be allowed for the appearance of the servant whose testimony must acquit him; in vain, in the most moving language, did he appeal to their feelings, represent the agonies of his unfortunate wife, and implore their consideration; he was heard by persons familiarised to scenes of sorrow and suffering, and who had no compassion to bestow on any of the Huguenot party, whose fate they were well convinced would excite no interest or inquiry; and Claude was reconducted to his dungeon, to leave it only when led to the place of execution.

Marcel, meanwhile, after he had obtained from Claude the necessary instructions how to act, having carefully concealed himself till an opportunity of escape occurred, resolved to lose no time in hastening to La Rochelle, and informing his friends of his dangerous position. He was well convinced in his own mind that the guilty person was no other than René.

He felt certain that, but for the artifices of which he knew the Italian to be capable, the innocence of Claude could not fail to be instantly established; but he also knew

that gold would not be spared, nor any effort of malice, to crush the foe whom René had resolved on destroying.

He met with little impediment on his journey, as the truce still continued, and the two parties, tired of their long contention, did not attempt to offer molestation to each other.

Notwithstanding his desire again to behold his master's daughter, to whom he was much attached, he resolved not to attempt seeing her, as he felt sure his grief would betray the fearful secret it was so necessary to conceal.

He arrived at the house of Belcastel wearied and exhausted, but unshrinking from the task he had imposed on himself. To him he delivered the billet, and recounted all the circumstances of the disastrous affair.

Struck with unspeakable horror, and impetuous in all his actions, Belcastel deliberated not a moment. He rushed into his wife's apartment, where he started to find Alix.

"Lesselline," he exclaimed, in a hurried tone, "I am obliged to leave you for a time on urgent business. Let not my absence distress you: it is unavoidable, but shall be as short as possible."

"Whither go you, Jules?" cried Lesselline; "for mercy's sake leave me not in this uncertainty!—what new danger threatens?"

"Where is my husband? does any peril menace him?" exclaimed Alix, as she gazed on him in trembling dread.

"Ask me nothing," cried he; "all will be well,—there is no fear,—calm yourself, dear Alix,—dearest Lesselline, be assured I will hasten back with glad tidings ere many days be past. Meantime adieu, and blessings rest with you!"

As Belcastel, in confused accents, spoke these sentences, he clasped his wife to his bosom, pressed the hand of Alix, and quitted them, after repeated assurances that business connected with the truce alone called him to Paris, though his disordered looks and faltering speech contradicted what he uttered; in a few moments, accompanied by Marcel, he was on his way to the capital.

They found nothing talked of on their arrival in Paris

but the tragical death of the President Bailly, and the approaching execution of his murderer.

Belcastel presented himself at the Conciergerie, but found entreaties, bribes, and threats equally unavailing to obtain him access to the prisoner. Distracted with dread, he then sought the officers who had decided so summarily the fate of an innocent man; Marcel accompanied him, and urged his claim to be examined as a witness, proclaimed his power to clear the accused, and called upon them to attend to his representations. All was in vain, they were treated with contumely and harshness, and at length forcibly expelled the court, and threatened with imprisonment should they venture to re-appear.

The despair of Belcastel was now at its height; all hearts seemed closed against the prayers of a Huguenot; justice in their case seemed but a name; René was evidently all powerful, and he thought with distraction of the prospect before him. Was there no way to save him? could he think of no expedient? there was one resource, a frail one perhaps, but he had no other: driven to desperation he resolved to adopt it, and without allowing himself time for reflection on the prudence or imprudence of the measure, hastened to put his design in execution.

Marcel had also conceived a plan which he imagined might offer some chance of success. He considered that Mabille had held an office of great trust about the late King, and might possess influence enough to induce Henry III. to interfere to save the life of an oppressed subject.

To Mabille he therefore went, and imparted to her the history of Claude's misfortunes. Her grief and agitation were extreme, and her terror still greater, that she had no power to effect his rescue.

"I will dare all," exclaimed she; "the King, the Queen-mother I will assail in turn; but, alas! will they listen to me? I have always been rather tolerated than liked by them, and he over whom I, at times, had power, is gone!"

Marcel hesitated not to tell her of his knowledge of the birth of Claude, with all the particulars of which he had

become acquainted, having heard the communication made by him to Bailly on that fatal evening, when he received his blessing and forgiveness; and they wept together over the sad fate of both father and son.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SCAFFOLD.

"She hath forgot how many a woeful stoure
For him she late endured: she speaks no more
Of past: true is't that true love hath no pow'r
To looken back." — SPENCER.

"But tho', dear youth, thou should'st be dragg'd
To yonder ignominious tree,
Thou shalt not want a faithful friend
To share thy bitter fate with thee." — JEMMY DAWSON.

ALIX, after Belcastel had left the chamber, stood motionless, as if rooted to the spot, without heeding the tears of her friend, who had sunk almost senseless on a seat. Some danger to her husband appeared to her as certain as though Belcastel had announced the fact of his present situation. She attempted to follow him, but had only power to support herself to the casement, where she beheld him, accompanied by a stranger, as it appeared to her, hastily mounting and with all speed riding from the door. She darted from the room, reached that which he had just quitted, although unconscious of what she sought, and there the first object that caught her eye was the paper written by Claude, which Belcastel, in his imprudent haste, had dropped on the floor. She read — "I am accused of murder." The words seemed traced in letters of flame — her starting eyes were riveted on the dreadful characters as with frantic terror she repeated the sentence. Her husband accused — dragged away — condemned — executed — all rushed before her mind's eye, and, still holding the fatal scroll, she re-entered the apartment of Lesselline. She had no words to tell the fearful story, but pointing to the lines, her friend but too soon perceived the cause of the wildness in her looks.

"Lesselline," cried the wife of Claude, "I must follow — I must see my husband — farewell!"

"No, Alix! no, dearest friend!" exclaimed Lesselline; "trust to Belcastel; he will save him, if human power can do it; you cannot aid him, and may but involve yourself in ruin."

"He is in the power of René; I know, therefore, that there is no hope; but my place is where he is, and I can die with him," said Alix, in a firm voice, as she collected all her strength, determined to attempt the project she had conceived.

No representations, no entreaties, could shake her resolution, and assuming the habit of a peasant, as little distinguished as possible, covered with the large mantle usually worn by that class of persons, and provided with means to forward her journey, Alix quitted La Rochelle, and once more found herself a wanderer. She took advantage of any conveyance she could meet with, and sometimes walked many leagues, for communication with distant parts of the country was at that time both difficult and dangerous for an unprotected female. How she surmounted all she was scarcely conscious, her mind was full of a vague horror and a presentiment of evil that confused and appalled her; but she was endowed with strength beyond her hopes, and, after hardship and exposure which at another time she could not have borne, she arrived at length in Paris, uncertain in her object, and filled with doubt and terror. As she entered the city gates she observed a great number of people collected to witness the feats of a mountebank rope-dancer.

The crowd which pressed around him was so dense that the unfortunate Alix, exhausted with fatigue and anxiety, could with difficulty make her way through: suddenly, in the midst of one of the most extraordinary vaults of the mountebank, a cry was heard at a little distance.

"To the Conciergerie! the execution is about to take place!"

A rush was immediately made, and the trembling Alix, leaning against a wall for support, in accents almost

inarticulate, inquired of some person near who was to suffer.

"The murderer of the President Bailly," was the answer.

Alix uttered a shriek of horror. "Who — who is the accused?" gasped she.

"The accused," replied the speaker, "is Claude Emars, secretary to Bailly; he who ran away with his daughter."

Alix had no need of the answer — her dread and despair had already revealed the truth. She felt the necessity of desperate resolution; she felt that if her senses deserted her at this moment, all was lost, and Claude must die without her having beheld him.

"Will any," said she, in a hoarse and scarcely-audible voice, "conduct me to the place of execution? I will reward him amply who will do such a service to a relation of the accused."

The person whom she addressed turned sharply round as she grasped his arm convulsively.

"No," answered he, "there is nothing new in a Huguenot's death; besides, I'd rather look on this antic here."

She released her hold, and was attempting to rush from the spot, when an elderly man, of decent appearance, bade her accept his conduct, and he would take charge of her. Scarcely heeding what he said, she suffered him to lead her forward, and hurried wildly along, following the direction of the crowd. Her eyes fixed, and unconscious on what she gazed, she reached, with her guide, the great square where the preparations for the intended execution were arranged; the man paused, for the pressure of the multitude was so great that to advance farther was perilous. Still Alix struggled on, he attempted to withhold her, as, without uttering a word, she writhed in his grasp; at this moment the prisoner was brought out, and conducted by guards to the foot of the scaffold.

He walked with a firm and undaunted air, till, having ascended a few steps, he turned round to the people, and in a loud voice cried out: — "I am an innocent man, and unjustly condemned without a hearing."

There was a murmur among the people, who, ever ready to yield to new excitement, heard his confident address with surprise, while his youth and noble demeanour created a sentiment of pity in every breast.

The guards, however, urged him on and prevented his again speaking: he had advanced a few steps higher, when the momentary silence of the crowd was broken by loud and repeated shrieks. Alix had seen the accused,—had heard his voice,—and her efforts became more violent, kept back as she was by the brutal populace;—his foot was on the last step, and in a piercing voice she cried out,

"Let me pass!—if you are human—let me pass!—I am his wife!"

A shudder ran through the crowd, every one shrank back, and Alix, unimpeded by all, darted along to the foot of the scaffold, and was divided from Claude only by his guards. They at first endeavoured to prevent her approach, but, whether intimidated by the hooting of the mob, or feeling some touch of compassion for her wretched situation, they made way for her, and in a moment Claude held her senseless in his arms.

Scarcely had the deeply-interested assembly time to look upon this spectacle, when a loud tumult was heard at a distance, and an immense body of people was seen advancing, armed with swords, clubs, staves, and every species of weapon. At their head was a young man, whose deadly pale countenance and hollow sparkling eyes expressed some powerful inward feeling. As he rushed along, with gestures of impatience, he exclaimed,—

"Citizens, will you give up your rights?—will you suffer the laws to be profaned by unjust magistrates?—will you allow the innocent to be sacrificed before your eyes? The real murderer of the President Bailly is known; he can be pointed out by a witness whom they have refused to hear. Claude Emars is innocent,—Rescue! rescue, from oppression and injustice!"

The words flew from mouth to mouth, and echoed through the enormous crowd, swelled by the hostile band that swept along like a torrent through the streets. "The

students!—the students!" cried a thousand voices, "let us follow the students of St. Germain des Prés!"

There was not an instant's pause, no opposition met their progress; the mob fell back, the guards attempted not to impede so formidable a body. Arrived at the spot to which their speed was directed, Belcastel, in a loud voice, commanded that the prisoner should be delivered, proclaiming that he designed to offer no violence to any one, but that since justice was in hands unworthy of such a trust, he and his comrades were resolved to administer it themselves.

The little resistance which was encountered by this resolute band was soon put an end to, and Belcastel, springing upon the platform where stood Claude, holding in his arms his inanimate wife, was soon pressed to his friend's bosom.

"Alas! Jules," exclaimed the agonized husband, "of what avail is my safety? She is dead!"

"No,—no!" cried Belcastel, assisting to support her, and lifting the thick ringlets from her face; "she breathes,—it is but faintness; hope better, my dear friend;—be collected, be firm,—we have but a moment."

He then advanced to the edge of the scaffold, and thus spoke to the people:

"Citizens,—I would not lead you into danger, nor excite you to hostility against the laws, but I would enforce their execution: and in the name of all present I demand of the judges who sentenced an innocent man, that Jean Marcel shall be instantly produced, and his deposition heard respecting the murder of the President, and that he be confronted with René Bianco, whom I accuse as the guilty person."

At the name of René a burst of indignation was heard, and loud cries were uttered by the people of "Down with the Italians! Long live the students, who defend our rights! Where is the evil spirit of St. Catherine?*—Bring forth the *Queen's Poisoner!* Release the prisoner,—let Marcel be examined,—we will see him;—no sup-

* The Queen-mother was called St. Catherine in derision.

pressing witnesses! Justice for the people!" and a thousand other exclamations of excitement and fury.

The magistrates, amazed and confounded, saw their power treated with contempt and themselves in danger. Bold in evil, and careless to prevent the effusion of innocent blood, they were cowards in the moment of peril to themselves; they gazed on each other in uncertain fear, but without making any demonstration of yielding.

New cries, however, now arose. "Let us set fire to the prison," shouted the mob, "and burn the drones in their hive!"

This determined them; and one of the least timid of the party mounted the scaffold, and addressed the hooting crowd below.

"This proceeding," said he, after having with difficulty obtained a hearing, "is most unwarrantable: but since it appears that there are other witnesses who have been illegally kept back, we consent that a new trial shall be applied for, and the person named examined."

This announcement was received with shouts; and when Marcel, who was watching with eager impatience the permission to ascend the scaffold, was seen to join the group already there, loud applause, as in a theatre, greeted him. The people, however, were not content with the promise made of a new trial, they insisted that Claude should be instantly released; and would attend to no remonstrances to the contrary. Louder and louder grew the din; and the probability was that the mob would have obtained their desire, when a sudden interruption was put to their attempts. The city guard, finding to what lengths the populace were likely to proceed, had despatched some of their band to procure more effectual assistance; and a company of regular troops arriving seemed likely to put a speedy end to the discussion.

Claude, almost distracted with fears for Alix, who had not recovered her senses, knelt beside her in an agony of sorrow, unmindful of the howling and yelling around him, seeing only her inanimate form, and trembling only for her existence. Marcel, weeping, supported her, and endeavoured to soothe his anguish by assurances that she still

breathed. Belcastel in vain tried to make himself heard; and the dismay and confusion were at the height, when a party of the royal guards dashed amongst the crowd, and the Duke d'Epernon, waving his sword, rode up to the scaffold, and in an authoritative voice demanded the reason of the uproar.

So many voices answered, that it was with difficulty he could comprehend the meaning of their vociferations.

"In the name of his Majesty I charge you peace!" cried he.

He was answered by hooting, and cries of "Let his Majesty give us justice then, though he has lost his Grace!* We will have a new trial; we will have justice, or take it!"

"How, ye vile crew!" cried the haughty favourite. "Dare you dictate to the King?"

"Down with the minions! let the King starch his wife's ruffs, and sew her petticoats! Vive Guise! Vive Navarre!" echoed from mouth to mouth.

At this moment other shouts arose; and, advancing slowly through the crowd, surrounded by attendants and guards, who drove the people in every direction, appeared the ponderous and splendid equipage of Henry the Third and his Queen. Curiosity to behold the extraordinary spectacle which now presented itself to the best advantage, took the place of the passions which had hitherto agitated the people; and they pressed round to gaze and admire.

Henry and his beautiful wife were seated in their immense and elaborately ornamented coche, accompanied by several ladies, and more than one of the obnoxious favourites of the King, whose effeminate appearance rendered it doubtful, at a first glance, to which sex they belonged: their long hair was curled, and turned over combs; their small ornamented caps of velvet were of the same shape as those worn by the ladies; and they had delicate open-worked ruffs, whose preposterous size had given rise to the observation that their heads thus supported looked like John the Baptist's in the charger: they were covered with jewels, and their beardless faces gave them a most unmanly

* The title of Majesty instead of Grace, lately introduced, gave great offence to the people.

and childish appearance. Besides these, the carriage was filled with favourites of another description — small dogs, called 'damarets,' obtained at immense expense; apes, marmozets, and parrots of splendid plumage, perched and peeped from the windows, and looked inquisitively on the groups around, while exclamations of wonder, delight, or disgust, greeted them.

"Ah! les maudites petites bêtes! Voilà donc des mignons d'un roi!" and other terms, were freely dispensed by the sneering and astonished rabble.

Henry, however, had good reasons for not allowing any but civil greetings to reach him on the present occasion. The Swiss deputies had become impatient at the long delay of their payments; and he meditated levying contribution to a large amount to satisfy them: it was, therefore, very necessary that he should obtain popularity at this moment, and he rejoiced at any opportunity of finding it. He had caused Paradis, as the public oratories in the streets were called, to be erected in various parts of the town; and was on his way to visit and pray before these when he was interrupted by the riot of which he now desired the explanation. With all the suavity and kindness of manner, which he knew well how to assume, he listened patiently to the account given, and even allowed some of the most clamorous of the mob orators to approach his carriage.

When the name of René Bianco was pronounced, a shudder passed over him, and he turned pale, dropping at the same time a bead of his large rosary.

"How," he cried, "dares an adventuring Italian barber to practise against the life of any of my subjects? No man is safe from these foreign plagues. I must see to this. Good people, be content,—you shall be satisfied,—justice shall be done in this case; and rest assured your King will watch over your interests, and not permit a hair of your heads to be injured if he knows it."

Loud acclamations followed this speech, which was delivered with that majesty and grace for which Henry had been formerly so distinguished. Loud shouts of "Long live the hero of Jarnac and Moncontour!— Long live Valois!" — succeeded to the seditious cries which had been

sent up to Heaven a few moments before; and Henry and his train drove off, after issuing commands that the accused should be treated with every care and attention and his wife allowed to remain with him, — an indulgence suggested by the gentle-minded Louise, and received by the people with rapturous applause. After this display of enthusiasm in the cause of his subjects, Henry proceeded through the streets, stopping at all the "Paradis," and finally indulging himself and his distinguished companions in a visit to the rope-dancer at the barrier.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GULF.

"La Mort ne devoit pas tarder si longuement
A terminer les jours de cette horrible peste.
Innocens, ne pleurez que ce retardement,
Et laissez aux méchants à pleurer tout le reste." — MAYNARD.

WHEN Henry returned to the Louvre, he requested an interview with his mother, to whom he related his adventure of the morning.

"This circumstance," said he, "is most fortunate for my popularity, and the execution of an Italian will still more please the people. René must, therefore, find no sanctuary in the palace, and must not be protected."

"What!" exclaimed Catherine, "am I to have my faithful servants torn from me, to gratify the malice of the brutal mob? René shall not be given up! — Let the Huguenot escape if you will, but he shall not replace him."

"That may scarcely be," replied Henry. "I have given my word that justice shall be done in this case, and I know not how I can maintain myself in the good graces of my loving subjects and deceive them at the same time."

"We have contrived to do that before," said Catherine, "and can again. Leave it to me, and let us consider matters of more moment. Prince Casimir's army has already joined Anjou, and the malcontents and Huguenots

swell their ranks each day. Anjou proclaims that unless he sees his sister at liberty, he will listen to no terms; and Navarre has sent to claim his wife, with threats of vengeance if she is longer detained. They are now the stronger, and we must yield."

"I have already ordered," returned the King, "that Marguerite's guard should be removed: let us go to her, and endeavour to do away with the bad impression this severity has made on her mind."

"Yes," said Catherine, "she must accompany me to Champagne to negotiate a peace, and if we fail to gain her she may injure rather than assist us."

"I would there were something she would ask me," mused Henry, "that I might make a merit of granting it to her entreaties."

They lost no time in visiting the Princess; where, in the humblest manner, both mother and son apologised for her late treatment, — deplored the violence of Du Guast towards La Torigni, and threatened him with severe censure for his conduct, which Henry assured her was unknown to him.

The Queen-mother, having left the brother and sister together, Marguerite, whom Mabille had succeeded in interesting in the cause, took that opportunity of imploring his clemency towards Claude, relating the circumstances of his case in moving terms. Henry, delighted at the occasion offered, pretended to be ignorant of the affair; but expressed with great warmth his determination to befriend the accused. Before he left her, he had summoned an officer of his guard, whom he directed immediately to hasten to the Conciergerie, and take all the necessary steps for Claude's release; and showed so much zeal that Marguerite, unsuspicious of the truth, was entirely won, and the apparent regret and tenderness of her brother, aided by his eloquence, succeeded in persuading her to use her utmost endeavours to procure a peace which should ensure tranquillity to France.

Henry resolved not to lose his advantage by permitting the escape of Bianco, notwithstanding his apparent concession to Catherine, and gave orders that the Italian

should be watched, and information given to the police of his proceedings.

Catherine, equally cautious and suspicious, saw at once the dangerous position in which Bianco stood, and felt that she could not trust the King, if he conceived that his interest was secured by the sacrifice of the Italian.

He, meantime, had not been ignorant of what had taken place, and was alive to his own peril; but he trusted to the power of his mistress; and, by shutting himself in her palace, hoped to escape the threatened danger. When he heard that it had been agreed for the Queen-mother and the Queen of Navarre to set out without loss of time on their journey of pacification to Sens, he imagined himself safe if he could secretly accompany them, and thus by his absence leave time for the ferment of popular indignation to pass away. He concealed himself, therefore, in the secret tower of the Queen, and held midnight conferences only with her; while she gave out that she had despatched him to England on important business.

The new trial, meantime, was conducted with great zeal by those who found it a matter of importance to the higher powers, and, although with as little regard to justice as before, answered the end of establishing the innocence of Claude.

Marcel's testimony was admitted as conclusive, and many other witnesses, before kept back by bribes and menaces, now were allowed to come forward. Still, although there was every reason to suspect René's guilt, no positive proof had been produced, and certain messages from the Queen-mother had influence enough to prevent too strict inquiry.

Claude was liberated with honour, and his acquittal was received by the people with transport; but when it was found that René had disappeared, and no measures were taken to discover his retreat, the fury of the expectant populace knew no bounds. Crowds assembled in various parts of Paris, and harangues were made, exhorting the citizens to insist on his punishment. The Queen-mother was openly reviled, and the good faith of the King called in question.

These meetings led the way to political discussions; the state of the country was canvassed, — a meeting of the states clamoured for, and every party maintained in vociferous appeals the general injustice and culpable indifference to the public weal of all the heads of the government.

The actions of the whole life of Catherine were recapitulated: her deceit to Catholics and Protestants; — the infamy she had brought on the nation by her fatal measure of the massacre which all good Catholics abhorred, and which was approved only by interested and malignant persons; her encouragement of foreigners; her crimes known and suspected; her unbounded extravagance and extensive exactions. Pamphlets were published against her, and passages read from them in the streets, and the *Discours Merveilleux* was in the hands of every one.

All over the walls of Paris were stuck defamatory papers; and one which created much amusement amongst the people and annoyance to the Court, set forth the titles of the King in a ludicrous point of view, calling him,

" Henri, par la grace de sa mère, inutile Roi de France et de Pologne imaginaire, Concierge du Louvre, Marguillier de St. Germain de l'Auxerrois, Bastelleur des Eglises de Paris, Gauderonneur des collets de sa femme et Friseur de ses cheveux, Mercier du Palais, Gardien des Quatre Mendians, Père conscript des Blancs Battus, et Protecteur des Capuchins."

Amongst those who listened to and joined in the harangues of the discontented people, were many of that community who had distinguished themselves in the troubles, and were always ready to ferment riots and disturbances in order to profit by them. Crucé and Flé, the butchers of the Faubourg St. Germain, heard not without reflection the general opinion concerning René; and when, after a time, the King, vexed at the sudden stop to his transient popularity, offered a reward to any who would discover and bring to justice the murderer of the President Bailly, they revolved in their minds the eligibility of their being the recipients of the sum, which their necessities, never diminished, made requisite to them.

Captain Florio had departed for Rome with most of his

band, having in charge the holy relic which, delivered to the Pope, was to secure to the community great advantages; he was shortly expected to return, and if René was not betrayed promptly he would probably interfere to prevent it, as the bond of amity between them was known to be strict, although their peculiar tie was not revealed.

The Queen-mother's protection was powerful, and it was evidently exerted to screen him from the law; but the King, it was as well known, was anxious to bring him to punishment, and his favour would be secured by his arrest. At a meeting in the Carrières the matter was therefore discussed, and as it was considered that the benefit of the brotherhood might be more advanced by gaining the good-will of Henry, measures were agreed upon accordingly.

Alix, in the tender care of Mabille, and watched over by her anxious husband, slowly recovered, and though deeply agonized at the fate of her father, saw so much to be grateful for in her husband's release, that by degrees her mind became restored to its former tone, and the tears she shed on the bosom of Claude were less poignant.

Belcastel, anxious to quiet the alarm of those dear to them all at La Rochelle, soon took his leave, it being agreed that as soon as Alix was able to travel, they, with Mabille, from whom they had resolved never to separate, should rejoin him at the friendly town which owed so much to their valour. With many tears and prayers they separated, to be restored to each other under happier auspices at a future period.

But René, although he felt himself safe in his retreat, could not consent to abandon the desire which he had so long nourished of revenge upon Claude, and determined even yet that he would not be foiled.

He imparted to the implacable enemy of Montgomery the facts connected with Claude's career, and found in Catherine a ready partisan.

"What!" she exclaimed, "must Hydra heads start up to brave me? Will the accursed race never be extinct? The son of Agnes de la Tour shall not go free, triumphant in success. Fate shall yet overtake him."

"To-morrow," said René, "you set out, Madonna, for Champagne, and I, in the disguise of one of your grooms, will follow in your train; once far from Paris, I can easily conceal myself till this storm has blown over; and when I return, who knows but your star may again have risen, and you be once more all-powerful? Let me now give into your hands this medal. I have before told you, when you have no longer sons to control you, your destiny will be to reign supreme; — why not a woman, as in England and other countries? — stranger things have happened. When once your mind is brought to the decision, the stars will work the rest. Meantime, take this, and hereafter it may serve you."

So saying he gave into her hands a box containing a medal, similar in some respects to that which has already been described, and charged her to keep it safely closed from sight, nor open it herself until she had made her last resolve to obtain, by a mysterious act, the power she had spent her life in seeking.

"To-night," said René, "I am to see one of those whom I can trust; he knows the residence of Claude and his wife, and will guide me thither. My visit," he added, bitterly, "is not one of friendship, but I go to pay the deep debt of gratitude I owe them. I shall return in time to assume my station near your Majesty, and quit Paris without question in your company. By daybreak, or before, you will see me again."

Midnight came, and with it, at the door of the Queen's tower, arrived a man muffled in a cloak; he was joined by one who descended the narrow winding stairs which led to the court, and after carefully closing the outer door, the pair proceeded, unchallenged by the sentinels, beyond the precincts of the palace. They crossed the river, and after walking a little distance stopped before a house on the quay opposite to the Louvre.

"Now," said Crucé, the butcher, to René, for the pair were no other than those worthies, "I have brought you to the spot, and the rest is your own business. I do not like to balk an old grudge; but be as quick about it as

you can, as our band are impatient to see you before you quit Paris, and have your directions for the future."

"You are sure Flé is within?" asked René.

"Yes," replied his comrade, "he supplies the house with meat, and the Huguenotaille are, after all, better customers than your good Catholics; he is the suitor of the porteress, and is waiting you there."

"In less than an hour, we meet then in the Carrières?" said René.

"Yes," said Crucé, "I shall be there, — and the trap shall be up ready for you."

As Crucé turned away he laughed inwardly; "He is safe," said he, "and the reward is ours."

He concealed himself in the shadow of the houses, and awaited the event of his treachery. In a few minutes after René had entered the house, a party of soldiers arrived, and stationed themselves near the door.

"Is he within?" asked the leader to Crucé, who on seeing them emerged from his concealment.

"Yes, safe," answered he; "Flé will give the signal in a moment."

At the same time as he spoke was heard the report of a pistol, and the door of the house was thrown violently open; — Flé was seen standing in the archway struggling with Bianco, who writhed in his powerful grasp; — the soldiers rushed upon them and secured their prisoner, while Flé, relinquishing his hold with a brutal laugh, resigned him to their custody.

"So! — you are well deceived, Messire René," said he; "you thought to find the Huguenot here and his pretty wife. I would have willingly helped you if I knew where they were, but we can do their business another time, — and get paid for it into the bargain."

René ground his teeth in fury, and in vain struggled hard with his detainers.

Amidst much laughter and brutal jesting at his expense, he saw the price of his capture paid to the two traitors who had sold him, and with feelings of fury not to be described he was dragged along by the guard towards the prison of the Conciergerie.

The noise and confusion consequent on his capture had roused the neighbourhood, and, as daylight was now breaking, and the workmen at different trades were already preparing for their day's employment, a crowd was speedily assembled round the soldiers. As soon as it was announced that the captive was René Bianco, a yell arose from the people of hatred and execration. "Give him up to us!" they cried. "We will do summary justice on him! if he goes to prison St. Catherine will rescue him!"

The guards endeavoured to keep them off, but their number was soon doubled by those of the rabble; from every street and lane new comers increased the concourse, and all clamoured for vengeance on the Italian. René saw that his danger was imminent, — that his fate appeared certain, but he was resolved to make a desperate effort to escape; he renewed his struggles with those who held him, who, pressed by the shouting mob, could scarcely keep their grasp firm. They were obliged also to defend themselves, and while some of their number attacked the people with their swords, the rest tried to make their way forward. A fresh party of the excited and angry rabble, irritated at the resistance opposed to their will, now closed in upon the soldiers, and in the scuffle almost forgot the object of their contention. With one vigorous effort René burst from the man who held him, and springing past the others found himself the first of the enormous crowd. Trusting to their surprise and confusion, and his own agility, he darted onward, and plunging down the first street, directed his way towards the Carrières, as his only chance of concealment and escape.

A loud yell told that his flight was observed, and, like hounds in pursuit, on rushed the mob; cries, howling execrations, were borne on the wind to his ears as he continued his headlong course, but he gained on his pursuers — he doubled, and dived into streets and alleys, while the numbers of those who pursued impeded to a certain degree their swiftness — he had gained the Rue St. Jacques, and far before him he beheld the house of Crucé.

For that goal he made, though even there he felt he might be insecure; the trap-door was said to be open, but

could he trust the words of one who had betrayed him?—could he be certain that some one was not there to bar his passage?

On, however, he flew, the surging sounds behind him; he reached the door — it was ajar — darted onwards to the yard, and beheld his betrayer in the act of stooping to unclose the spring-door that admitted to the Carrières. One bound and he had reached him, one blow and the dagger of the Italian was buried in the back of the gigantic ruffian; he fell heavily forward, and the purse, in which were his ill-gotten gains, clanked upon the stone. René leaped down the opening, but found that to close it was impossible, for the body of the expiring Crucé lay across it. There was no time to lose — he hurried to the bottom of the stairs, and as he reached the last step paused to recover his breath, but the sounds of terror which had urged him on burst once more full upon his ear; — he could distinguish words, uttered by the strong voice of the butcher who writhed in his dying agonies, — "Follow — the path to the right — straight on — our band will help — they are all sworn to betray him."

Which way should he fly? his pursuers had the clue—he dared not take the way he knew, which led to the great temple in the centre. There were other outlets, — one of which he might find, and emerge into the light of day at the other extremity of these tremendous caves.

He chose a dark path to the left, for already he heard that his pursuers had descended; — for a long time he ran panting, exhausted — the blood rushing from his ears, — his eyes blinded by the darkness — deeper and deeper grew the gloom — the air was stifling, vapours of fœtid odour seemed to rise from the caverns round — flights of bats shrieked by him, and flapped their leathery wings in his face — he would have stopped, but he seemed urged on by an invisible power — he felt grasped by unseen hands — he heard or fancied the roaring rabble still near, and shrieks and cries like those which he had delighted to listen to in the massacre of St. Bartholomew rang through the damp vaults through which he fled.

His heart stopped — his brain reeled, his feet refused

to bear him farther — a dim, indistinct ray shot down a passage at a distance — he knew it must come from one of the interior halls where the robbers were accustomed to meet; he tried to call, but his tongue was like iron in his mouth; one more effort he thought, and he might reach the light, and discover some means of escape even yet; — he sprang forward — there was a plash, a dull sound as of a descending mass, and the dark waters of a yawning gulf had received the body of the murderer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

"* * Les voûtes célestes
N'ont elles plus de foudre et de feu et de pestes?
Ne partiront jamais du trône où tu te sieds
Et la mort et l'enfer qui dorment à tes pieds?" — D'AUBIGNÉ.

CATHERINE, at the appointed time, finding that René did not arrive, waited long and impatiently; she feared some accident had befallen him, but was far from imagining the terrible catastrophe which had really taken place. Having left a sealed packet on the table of her tower, with directions that he should follow her immediately to Sens, she quitted Paris, with her train and the Queen of Navarre; but she never heard more of Bianco.

The two Queens negotiated so well, that a pacification was agreed on; and, according to the powers granted her, Catherine promised the most advantageous terms to the revolted party. The defamatory sentences pronounced against the Admiral de Coligni and others, in consequence of trials carried on after their deaths, were annulled; and the Duke d'Anjou, the Prince de Condé, and the King of Navarre, pronounced good and loyal subjects, who had taken up arms only in defence of their King and country. Prince Casimir's troops were to be paid, and honours and emoluments offered him; the Governments of the French Princes to be restored to them; and all that could be de-

sired granted to those who of late were looked upon as traitors and rebels.

There was, however, more sound than meaning in all these professions. Artful delays succeeded; and the Huguenots found that their only hope of success was in retaining as much power in their hands as possible, and in crediting as little the professions of their hollow friends.

The Catholics now began to take alarm at the concessions to the Huguenots, which fear had extorted from the King; and the Ligue, that scourge of the nation, started up, with all its plots, and wars, and struggles, and deceptions: the wars of the Three Henries then raged with fury, and unhappy France looked in vain for repose.

Marguerite de Navarre had to deplore the influence of her star, which rose and set on continued misfortunes. The Duke of Anjou, her favourite brother, died of a slow fever, never having, as the famous journalist of the period expresses it, "been in health since his visit to the King at Paris, or recovered the *good cheer* he met with there, which cost him dear enough."

A grand funeral was made for him; and Henry the Third had an opportunity of displaying his fondness for dress in a new form. He appeared in a robe of violet Florence serge, of eighteen ells in breadth, with a flowing train, which was borne by eight gentlemen, and walked in this state from the Louvre to the church of Saint Magloire, where the body lay in state.

He was preceded by a great number of nobles, princes, cardinals, and bishops in deep mourning. The gentlemen, mounted on white horses, were arrayed in black, with large caps; the bishops in their rochets, with the scapulary and mantle of black Florence serge; and the cardinals in their accustomed violet habiliments.

The King's Swiss guard walked with their drums covered with crape; the Scotch archers surrounded his Majesty; and the French guards, at distances near his person, all having their uniforms and arms covered with black crape.

The young Queen Louise followed in a carriage covered with cloth of tan-colour; she herself alone within, dressed

in robes of the same hue: after her came eight coaches covered with black. The body was then brought to Nôtre Dame, and, after a magnificent mass, was buried with great pomp and ceremony. The King, during the whole of the five hours that the funeral procession took to pass from one church to the other, stood at a window of a house opposite to the Cathedral, in order to be seen in his violet robes by all the people. He was accompanied by many of the great opposition Lords, some of whom, particularly the Duke de Guise, with whom he then pretended to be on terms of friendship, were remarked as appearing much more sad than himself: for the amusement which Henry seemed to find in watching the procession, which he did also, from another house in the Rue St. Denis, on the preceding day, had apparently quite banished the grief he was supposed to feel for the loss of his brother. The whole seemed conducted with more pomp than feeling; and the Archbishop of Bourges, in making the funeral oration, was more occupied in thinking of the fine beard he wore than of the subject in question; on which occasion, the following distich was disseminated in Paris, according to the custom of the period:—

"Quod timet, et patulo promissam pectore barbam
Demulcet Biturix, hoc Ciceronis habet."

Marguerite alone wept for her brother; for it has never been recorded that Catherine even affected sorrow for his loss, although her hatred to Henry of Navarre increased in proportion as these numerous deaths brought him nearer to the throne; for Henry the Third's repeated pilgrimages to Chartres had failed to obtain for him the blessing of children. So fearful was the Queen-mother that the crown should pass to the House of Navarre, that she was suspected of favouring the designs of the Guises, that the Duke should be declared successor, a fact which probably hastened his fate.

The hopes of the Queen of Navarre, that her affection and attachment to her husband would in the end be appreciated and returned by him, were never destined to be realized. Too many enemies and rivals stepped between her and her happiness, and in her solitary abode at the

château d'Usson in Auvergne she had to regret the destruction of all her dreams, even while she rejoiced at the successes of him whom she continued to love to the last.

Endymion, her faithful page, passed a few fleeting years in following the fortunes of his beloved mistress, and dying, as he wished to do, in her presence, gained all he had desired, her tears, and those celebrated lines which exposed her to the censure which she was fated never to escape. On him was written the poem which critics have considered a chef-d'œuvre of correctness, but which her kind feelings alone inspired:

> "A ces bois, ces prés, et ces antres
> Offrons les vœux, les pleurs, les sons,
> La plume, les jeux, les chansons,
> D'un poëte, d'un amant, d'un chantre."

When her consent was gained, that by the dissolution of her marriage with Henry the Fourth he might unite himself to Marie de Medicis, — the affecting letter in which she gave him up her rights drew tears from his eyes, and he exclaimed —

"Ah, unfortunate Marguerite! She knows well that I have always loved and honoured her, but that *she loved not me*, and that it was her indifference which has separated us from each other for ever!"

Alas! that foes and fortune should thus have disunited two hearts formed for mutual happiness!

* * * * *

Claude and Alix, with Mabille, whom they attached to them for the remainder of her life, returned to La Rochelle, and in due course of time Claude visited Scotland where he took possession of his small estate. He would not however claim his rights as Count de Montgomery, as he was unwilling to injure the interests of his brothers. He contented himself with their acknowledgment of his birth, and ceded all to his next brother who had been brought up to expect the title. He lived honoured and respected by all of the Protestant party, and had the happiness of witnessing the triumphs of Henry the Fourth. Alix suc-

ceeded to her father's wealth, and the Abbey of Bourgueil was sold to the Père Pacifique.

Nantouillet never altered his bachelor state, and adopted the children of Mathurin Lussaut and the pretty Clarice, who lived with him until his death, when he left them independent.

The Queen-mother heard with much satisfaction that Florio, the sole depository of the secrets of her early life, —he whose knowledge she dreaded, and whose revelations would have disclosed crimes to which even those already too well known to the world would have appeared trifling, —had renounced the world, and buried his wickedness and his remorse in one of the most remote seclusions in the deserts of Calabria, and she smiled secretly to hear that the severe piety of his life had attracted pilgrims to the convent which he had honoured by his selection. She sent from time to time large sums as donations to the holy community, as a means of obtaining their prayers. It was thought that the honours of canonization would reward the zeal and virtuous example of the brightest ornament of the order whenever the immaculate spirit of Father Innocent, which was the appropriate name he chose, should be claimed by its kindred; and Catherine gained no little credit by the reverence which she appeared to pay to so exalted a character, and the benefits which she bestowed on his convent.

* * * * *

In the same chamber in which she had plotted with her son Charles the Ninth the destruction of the house of Navarre, — in the same château of Blois lay, burning with fever and distracted with pain of body and mind, the Queen-mother.

The horrible tragedy of the murder of the Duke and Cardinal de Guise had just been committed. She had heard the whole account; the terrible details had been too faithfully repeated to her, and in imagination she witnessed the butchery which was going on in the chamber beneath her own, where her inhuman son superintended the separation of the limbs of his victims. The smoke of the pile

which consumed them seemed to rise to her brain, and the dust of their ashes cast to the wind so that no relics might ever be collected by their partisans, — to stifle the pulses of her heart.* It was not regret for their fate which caused her this agony which she could not control, although she had looked to the Guises alone of late for support; it was the fact that Henry of Navarre came like a hideous phantom in a dream nearer and nearer, till but one slender tie held him from the sovereignty of France, and in that vision she beheld the total annihilation of her power.

While she lay in this state the door of her chamber was suddenly thrown open by a rude hand, and, unannounced, King Henry, her son, burst into the room, and stood by the side of her bed. He was very pale; his lips were parched and white, and his eyes glowed with an unnatural fire; his dress was in disorder and stained with blood.

"Madam," cried he, in a piercing voice, "the King of Paris is dead, and henceforth I am King!"

Catherine rose on her couch and looked at him with a stern aspect.

"You have put to death the Duke de Guise," said she. "Heaven grant that this murder render you not a KING OF NOTHING! This work is well cut out, but it must be sewn; — are all your measures taken?"

"Yes, Madam," replied her son, — "all. I have taken such precautions that, in future, you need interfere no more."

So saying, without another word and with a fierce countenance, he turned his back on his mother and left the chamber, as he had entered it, without ceremony.

The spirit of Catharine quailed; she felt that her power was gone; the blood rushed burning through her veins, — her head beat and her heart throbbed violently.

"He shall not conquer yet," exclaimed she, after a pause; "while I have life I will not yield!"

She then commanded her attendants to prepare for her rising, and in spite of their remonstrances and those of

* Henry the Third assisted at the burning of the bodies of his victims in a chamber of the palace at Blois.

her physician, she left her bed and caused herself to be dressed as usual. She then immediately repaired to the church of St. Sauveur, where she heard mass, to the surprise of all to whom her illness was known. On her return she visited the Cardinal de Bourbon, who was detained a prisoner in the castle; she found him in a state bordering on distraction, and forgetting all disguise or respect he poured forth a torrent of abuse and reproach.

"You are the cause of all," he cried. "Did you not seduce us with false promises of security? — Did we not rely on your word — on your proclaimed friendship, and are we thus repaid? Deceitful, treacherous woman! — scourge of France, and betrayer of those who trust you — leave me in peace to mourn over the murder of my friends and the miseries of my country!"

Catherine uttered not a word, but quitted the apartment and retired to her own.

"Give me my casket," said she to one of her ladies, "and retire till I summon you."

She was obeyed, and a small ebony casket presented to her. She took from her bosom a key with which she opened it, and disclosed to view several coins of mysterious formation; these she placed on her pillows, and from the box which René Bianco, at his last interview, had given her, she took one which she regarded with extreme attention.

It was a medal of bronze, shaped like a shield, such as the ancient Romans consecrated to their gods. On it was engraved, in relief, the figure of Catherine herself on her knees before an altar, on which was a throne, whereon sat the form of a hideous demon, from whose nostrils issued fire, and whose eyes were dilated with an expression of malignity and fury not to be described. To this form the kneeling Queen appeared to be making supplication; — beside her knelt her three sons, Charles, Henry, and François of Anjou, and over their heads was inscribed — "SOIT: POURVU QUE JE RÈGNE."*

"Yes," muttered Catherine, "I am now resolved, — I will resign him too. I loved Henry beyond my whole

* All these facts are recorded by historians of the time.

soul! — he has abandoned me, and I offer him up as a sacrifice! Let me, Great Spirit! — let me triumph yet, and all I prize in this world and in the next is yours!"

At that moment a loud peal of thunder shook the walls of the castle, and one of the most terrific tempests which had ever been known in France, burst with awful violence over the town of Blois, burning and destroying houses, churches, and towers;* — the waters of the Loire rose in billows like the sea, and, overflowing their banks, swept away villages, and desolated the country for miles round.

In the midst of the din of the roused elements, rose the shrieks of one struggling in mortal agony. Catherine de Medicis lay gasping on the floor of her chamber, surrounded by her ladies, who, terrified at the appalling fierceness of her aspect, dared not approach her. For several hours the conflict continued, and, during the whole of that time, her cries and screams filled the halls and galleries of the castle of Blois with terror and amazement. Her son heard them, but he shrank from the sound with guilty dread; — all those who had knelt and fawned upon the powerful and haughty woman, whose nod had swayed a world, hurried away from the closing scene with fear and consternation; — one by one her attendants glided from the chamber, and Catherine, the Queen, fell dead upon the floor — alone!

* All these facts are recorded by historians of the time.

THE END.

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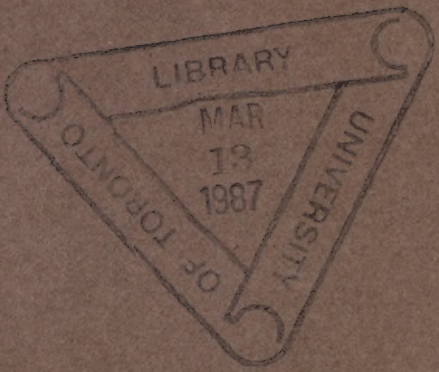
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